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GUARDIANS OF FAIR PLAY:
HOW ANTI-CHEATING MEASURES ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CHESS

IN TODAY'S CHESS WORLD, IT IS NOT THE BEAUTIFUL GAMES OR TOURNAMENT VICTORIES THAT ARE MAKING THE HEADLINES. **EVERYTHING CONNECTED TO CHEATING IS**

KORCHNOI, KARPOV AND ME BY GRANDMASTER RAYMOND KEENE OBE

IMPRESSUM

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Do chess players have a sense of humour?

In the report from the World Rapid and Blitz tournament in Samarkand, published in January, we wrote about the case of GMs Nepomniachtchi and Dubov who were stripped of half a point each for "horsing around" the chessboard. Namely, in the World Blitz they prearranged a draw (something not that rare in Blitz events among top players), but in a very obvious and - for some - insulting way: by playing several moves only with their knights moving them for one part of the board to the other. They argued they did nothing wrong and suggested this was just a bit of fun and humour on the chessboard. In fact, on social media we can see players joking often but usually in a way which is understandable to very niche circles.

Humour plays a crucial role in social interactions. Studies have consistently shown that a sense of humour is associated with various positive outcomes, including improved mood, reduced stress, and enhanced overall well-being. Humour can act as a coping mechanism in challenging situations. All the things that chess players would also benefit from.

However, you won't get that impression from many chess players at top events.

In recent years I have started attending global chess events more often, usually in the role of the press officer. It was extremely difficult in the beginning (and, still is, but I am now used to it) to "break the ice" with the players. I tried politely introducing myself (which, in one case, led to a player accusing me of "attacking them"; unknowing to me at that time was that the player in question is well known for his odd social behaviour so nobody took it seriously), but also I tried to joke with them. It didn't really work. If you're not a GM or a well-known person in their circles, they just tend to ignore you or, at best, they are extremely serious and reserved, even when asked a joking question.

However, having done quite a few events in recent years, it seems they have finally "warmed up" to me and now occasionally I even get greeted with a nod or a smile. Relationships with people depend on taste and character, but, personally, I would single out Peter Svidler, Teimour Radjabov and Anish Giri as players with the most sense of humour at top events nowadays. (There are, of course, others.) While Svidler and Radjabov's jokes are on the level of being quite sophisticated and dry, Giri is more the uplifting type, even when severely struggling in the tournament.

But, given that many of the world's top chess players have been playing chess their whole life and are moving only in chess circles, their sense of humour and abilities to produce/get jokes almost completely revolve around their own (small) world, which makes it difficult for "outsiders" to follow. Unless we are talking about people who live off scanning social media profiles of chess players 24/7, but that is another - seems very insular - type of audience.

Let me end with another example of real humour at a chess board: In the 1951 Bad Pyrmont Zonal, Efim Bogoljubov was playing as Black against Harry Golombek. Bogoljubov needed a point to qualify for the Interzonal. After a long struggle he managed to win a pawn but in the end he entered a theoretically drawn position. Bogoljubov then decided to sacrifice the extra pawn, explaining later on: "Well, now nobody can say how Bogoljubov drew in an endgame with an extra pawn"!

Editor

THE IMPORTANCE OF ANTI-CHEATING

By GM Aleksandar Colovic; www.alexcolovic.com

In today's chess world, it is not the beautiful games or tournament victories that are making the headlines. Everything connected to cheating is

Fraudulent behaviour has always attracted interest from the public and chess is not an exception. The only difference with other sports is that **real** cheating in chess became possible only relatively recently. It is approximately 20 years since the emergence of strong chess programs. The difference with doping in other sports or with cheating in earlier times, is that their use *guarantees* success and they have become increasingly easier to use and, more importantly, hide.

Nobody wants to be cheated. It creates a wide range of emotions, from anger and rage to helplessness and despair. Often, it is enough only to instil the thought of cheating in the player's mind, and from that moment (s)he is incapable of playing anymore - the inner peace is lost and the player is torn apart by doubts which may, or may not, be true. This is what happened to Magnus Carlsen when he lost the game to Alisher Suleymenov, analysed in the November issue of BCM for 2023.

These changes have led to an increased demand for anti-cheating measures, also known as fair play measures. Just like after 11 September 2001, additional controls were introduced at airports, today additional controls are required by the players so that they feel safe when playing their games.

The famous Rilton Cup took place in Stockholm, from 27 December to 5 January. An open tournament with a long tradition, it attracts players from all over the world. It is exceptionally well organised, with the playing hall conveniently located in the hotel where the majority of players are staying.

In the previous edition of the Rilton Cup, the organisers expressed their desire to incorporate fair play measures in their event and this year's edition followed suit. As one

of the only seven Fair Play Officers (FPO) in the world, I was invited to take care of that aspect of the organisation. While open tournaments are generally not required to have such a high level of protection measures, which is usually reserved for FIDE's top events like the Candidates tournament, for example, the experience from Stockholm showed that they would be well-advised if they comply with these requirements.

The work of the FPO is not merely to scan players when they enter the playing hall. It is much more complex. It starts with the analysis of the venue and the determination of the possible weak spots. A close communication with the organisers is necessary at all times because the possible solutions to the issues with the venue have to be solved in cooperation with the organisers. An example of this can be the cordoning of a pathway to the restroom that will be used only by the players when the actual placement of ropes needs to be done in communication with the organisers and the hotel staff.

When the possible problems have been determined, the FPO would suggest possible solutions. They vary tremendously and often depend on what is at his/her disposal. Some organisers can arrange for airport scanners to be present, others cannot. Some organisers can count on a big number of volunteers, while others can count only on one or two, or, none.

The FPO needs to know in advance how many people (s)he has at his disposal. Sometimes these people need to be trained in order to be able to perform their duties. This will determine the way solutions to problems will be implemented. If we take the example from above, if it's not possible to ensure a safe pathway for the players and they can get out of sight, then a possible solution would be to place a volunteer (who has also been trained beforehand) to observe the problematic space.

Every venue has its own problems, so every tournament is a different story. There will inevitably be problems that occur while the tournament is under way. These need to be solved efficiently and with common sense in mind. This also requires good cooperation with the arbiters.

To give you an idea of the type of problems an FPO can face, here's an example and a question for you to think about: you (as an FPO) have an 11-year-old girl with diabetes who wants to play in the tournament. She needs to have her equipment attached to her arm at all times, with a mobile phone nearby to send signals to her father in case of a major drop or rise in blood sugar. Do you allow the girl to participate in the tournament? (How the FPO at the Rilton Cup solved this situation is explained at the end of this article).

Many unforeseen circumstances occur during chess tournaments, so a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Fair Play Regulations is a must. All decisions must be taken with those regulations in mind, but also never forgetting the experience of all the players who have come to enjoy the game by participating. Providing a pleasurable experience for everybody involved while at the same time ensuring a safe environment is the ideal outcome when it comes to anti-cheating measures.

The scanning of the players with hand-held metal detectors is what most of the chess public associates with Fair Play. That is only the surface. While mobile phones and other electronics are forbidden in the playing hall, the FPO's work doesn't stop when the rounds start and all the players have been scanned. Patrolling the hall and observing what is happening is an integral part of the FPO's duties. Needless to say, this continues until the

last game of the round has finished. A fine eye for detail and deviation from "normal" behaviour are requirements for the detection of possible problems.

After the round, the FPO receives a statistical analysis of the games and this analysis needs to be followed carefully, as it can indicate a possible problem.

That development is not far off. The plague of cheating is eating away at our noble game and players want to be able to play in a safe environment, without fear or doubt

The fair play work at the Rilton Cup received feedback from the players and the parents of some of the participants. I had colleagues approach me and express huge satisfaction with the controls and delight at being able to play with a feeling of safety and comfort.

One day, an Indian lady, a mother of one of the many Indian players who played in Stockholm, overjoyed by the conditions, asked me: "Why isn't it like this in all open tournaments?"

I could only smile in return as the answer was simple enough: money. Few organisers can invest in special anti-cheating measures in their events, let alone hire a top fair play professional to organise and manage their events.

That answer will soon have to face the reality of the players choosing where to play. The Indian lady said that they were very happy to play in Stockholm rather than in some other tournament they had initially intended. If the players start to demand strict anti-cheating controls and choose events that implement them, then the organisers will be left with little choice but to start implementing them, unless they wish to end up with a diminishing number of participants.

That development is not far off. The plague of cheating is eating away at our noble game and players want to be able to play in a safe environment, without fear or doubt. The chess public also wants our game to remain clean and devoid of the scandals that have troubled the image of chess.

With the education of the public and a professional approach at events, we can transform the image of chess and bring back the nobility and purity of our game. It is time to leave behind the stories of sex toys and restroom photos in the past and move to a brighter and safer future.

Answer to the question posed in the article above: It was a difficult decision to take. If the regulations were strictly followed, the girl should not have been allowed to play as she would have prohibited items with her. But an FPO must be able to decide what's best in the given situation without compromising on security. I consulted with my team and the organisers and we realised that we didn't want to destroy a little girl's dream to play in an over-the-board tournament. So, we decided to take measures: first, we met and spoke with the father. We inspected the medical equipment and the phones they were using. We checked the phone for chess apps, which we asked to be uninstalled. We allowed the girl to play and she was under supervision. No foul play was detected throughout the event. In the end, by some preventive thinking and adjusting to the situation it was possible to accommodate the wishes of a "tricky" participant while still maintaining the integrity of the tournament.

TOURNAMENT REPORT: WIJK 2024

WEI YI - "THE BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT IN MY CHESS CAREER"

THE ENTERPRISING AND UNCOMPROMISING STYLE OF THE PLAYER WHO WENT UNDER THE RADAR FOR WAY TOO LONG FEELS LIKE A BREATH OF FRESH AIR COMPARED TO THE MORE CONSERVATIVE APPROACH AT THE TOP EVENTS

By GM Aleksandar Colovic; www.alexcolovic.com

Photo: Jurriaan Hoefsmit / Lennart Ootes / TATA Steel Official

The 86th edition of the Tata Steel chess tournament in Wijk aan Zee (13-28 January) proved what we sensed all along – it is possible to have a very exciting tournament without Magnus Carlsen

The world's number 1 decided to skip this year's Wijk, but, in a video message to the participants, promised to be back. Other notable absentees were the Americans Fabiano Caruana, Hikaru Nakamura (who, as we all know by now, is a streamer) and Wesley So, but everybody else from the top was also present and this included the new wave of the young generation.

Inviting young players has proven to be a guaranteed recipe for success for Wijk. Add to the mix the best "experienced" players (i.e. the players from the top of the rating list), spice it up with the World Champion, playing after an absence of eight months, and the women's World Champion, and you get a tournament that gets all the attention.

In the Challengers section, there was a similar mix: experienced rating favourites and aspiring young players, plus local talent, provided for fierce battles in every round.

The absence of a clear favourite like Magnus Carlsen made the event wide open when it came to winning it. The race was very tight, with more than half (!) of the participants within one point after round 10.

The tournament started with a curious statistic: in the first three rounds Black won 10 games while White won only one. Kasparov used to say that when White is losing more games the reason is bad play.

The early leaders were Alireza Firouzja and Anish Giri. Firouzja started with 2/2 and then 3/4, but then his roller-coaster ride began. He had five (!) decisive results in a row, all games won by White, where he won two and lost three.

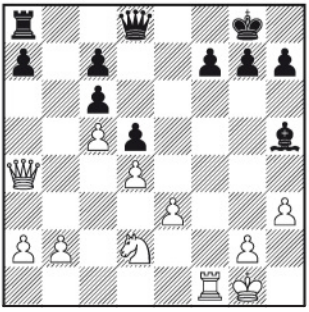
JU'S SENSATION AGAINST FIROUZJA

The game that made the headlines was his first loss in the tournament, to the women's World Champion, Ju Wenjun.

Ju Wenjun chose the Exchange Variation of the French Defence and obtained a solid position. After pieces were exchanged the position was equal. Then she outplayed the rating favourite in a very uneven game with a lot of missed chances for both sides.

Ju Wenju - Alireza **Firouzja**

86th Tata Steel Masters Wijk aan Zee NED (5.3)



The position is balanced. Black has doubled pawns on the queenside while White has a backward pawn on the e-file.

18...♕e8 19.♖e1 f5 Possible, but a bit risky. It's either a sharp attempt by the rating favourite to unbalance the sterile position, or he was worried about the possible e4-break. The problem with the move is that it weakens the e5-square, an ideal spot for White's knight. It cannot get there yet, but it's an issue Black needs to be careful about.

19...a5 is an alternative, stopping ♕a6. Now in case of 20.e4 dxe4 21.♖xe4 ♕d7 Black has counterplay thanks to the good control of the light squares, for example 22.♘c4 ♗g6 23.♘e5 ♕d5 24.♖f4 ♖e8 25.♕xa5 ♗e4 and Black has threats on the kingside and against the d4-pawn.

Ju stunned Firouzja in round five

20.♕a6 Threatening ♕b7 and also intending to bring the queen back to the kingside along the f1-a6 diagonal.

20...f4 21.♕f1 This attacks the pawn on f4 and forces Black to capture on e3.

The immediate 21.♕d3 doesn't force Black to take on e3, for example 21...♖b8 22.b3 ♕e6 when there is some tension in the position after 23.e4 ♖f8 with the idea of ...f3.

21...fxe3 22.♕d3 White will recapture the pawn soon enough.

22...e2? Black wants to keep the pawn alive as long as possible, but this is a mistake.

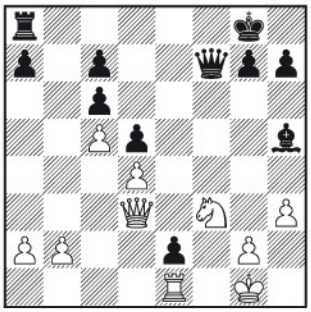
22...♕b8 gets away from the pin and attacks the pawn on b2. After 23.♖xe3 ♕xb2 24.♖e7 White has compensation for the pawn and the position is still objectively equal.

23.♘f3?! The second-best option in the position.

23.g4! ♗g6 24.♕xe2 was much stronger, winning the e-file and threatening ♕e7 or ♕e6, attacking Black's queenside. Black is under severe pressure here. 24...♕f7 *(the exchange of queens after 24...♕xe2 25.♖xe2 with threats like ♖e6, ♖e7 and ♘f3-e5 gives White a winning advantage.)* 25.♕e6 ♖b8 26.♕xf7+ ♔xf7 27.b3: the endgame is

very good for White. Black has stopped the penetration of the white rook, but the threat of ♘f3-e5 is still serious.

23...♕f7?



Black misses a chance to get rid of the potentially dangerous knight.

23...♗xf3 was simplest. After 24.♕xf3 ♖b8 25.♖xe2 ♕g6 White doesn't have access to Black's queenside weaknesses and Black's active pieces should keep the balance without too many problems;

23...♕f8 was a better square for the queen on the f-file. 24.♘e5 *(24.♘g5 now doesn't attack the queen, so Black can play 24...g6! 25.g4 ♗xg4! 26.hxg4 ♕f4 27.♘h3 ♕xg4+ 28.♔h2 ♖e8 with compensation for the piece.)* 24...♕f4 with counterplay.

24.♘g5! A double attack on the queen and the pawn on h7.

24...♕g6 24...♗g6 25.♕xe2 ♕f6 26.♘f3 and the knight makes it to e5, with a big advantage to White.

25.♕xg6 ♗xg6 26.♖xe2 The endgame is close to winning for White. The knight is coming to e5 and Black doesn't have compensation for the pawn weaknesses on the queenside.

26...h6 27.♘f3 ♗e4 28.♘e5 Compare the light pieces - the knight on e5 is winning the pawn on c6, while the pretty bishop on e4 will be doing nothing once White removes the pawn from g2.

28...a5 29.♘xc6 a4 30.♖e3 Threatening ♖a3 and b3, to win the a4-pawn.

30...♖a6 31.♘b4 It was also possible to return to e5.

31...♖g6 32.g3 h5 There isn't really any counterplay on the kingside, but Black must try something.

33.♖a3 White won't be able to take the a4-pawn, so it was better to exchange it.

33.h4 ♔f7 34.a3 followed by b3 would have created a passed pawn on the a-file.

33...♔f8 34.♔f2 ♖f6+ 35.♔e2 ♖g6 Black is latching onto the g3-pawn, thus indirectly defending the pawn on a4.

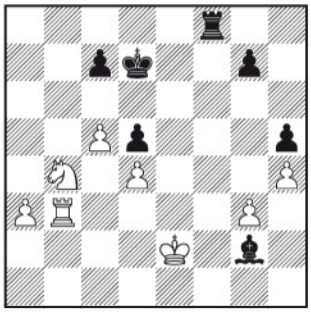
36.h4 ♔e8 37.♖e3 ♔d7 38.a3 Only now does White return to the plan of creating a passed pawn on the a-file, but Black has managed to bring his king to the centre.

38...♖e6 39.♔d2 39.♘a2! - with the idea of ♘c3 - was a better way to improve the position, but with only two moves before the time control, White repeats moves.

39...♖f6 40.♔e2 ♖f8! Black doesn't repeat and uses the opportunity to use the rook along the eighth rank, useful for play on the files on the queenside.

41.b3 Finally creating the passed pawn on the a-file.

41...axb3 42.♖xb3 ♗g2?



Black lets the a-pawn advance and removes the bishop from the e4-square from where it stopped the activation of the white rook.

42...♖a8! would have stopped the advance of the a-pawn and made White's progress significantly more problematic. 43.♔e3 ♔e6 and it's hard to see how White can move forward, as 44.♔f4?? loses to 44...♖f8+ 45.♔g5 *(45.♔e3 ♖f3+ loses the rook on b3.)* 45...♖f5+ 46.♔g6 ♖f3+ and Black wins. The imprecisions White committed after obtaining the winning advantage could have cost her half a point, but luckily Firouzja wasn't very precise in defence that day.

43.♖e3 This is also a possible way. The threat is ♖e5, so the bishop must return to e4.

43.a4! ♗f1+ 44.♔d2 ♗c4 45.♖e3 ♖f2+ 46.♔c3 with a5 next was a more direct way. After 46...♖f1 47.a5 ♖a1, 48.♖e5! is the key move, starting to attack Black's pawn on d5 and the kingside and combining that attack with the advance of the a-pawn. 48...♖a3+ *(48...♖xa5 49.♘xd5 is hopeless.)* 49.♔d2 ♖xg3 50.a6 and White should win, though some calculation is still necessary.

43...♗e4 44.♘a2! The knight from c3 attacks both the bishop on e4 and the pawn on d5.

44...♖b8 45.♘c3 ♖b2+ 46.♔e1 ♖b3 Black tries active counterplay, this being his only chance.

47.♔f2 ♗h1 47...♖b2+ 48.♖e2 wins after 48...♖b3 49.♘xe4 dxe4 50.♖xe4 ♖xa3 51.♖e5

48.♘d1 The rook on e3 defends everything along the third rank, but White still needs to improve the position of her knight and king.

48.a4! ♖a3 49.♔e2, with the idea of bringing the king to b2, was better.

48...♖b8 49.♖e5? It was better to return to the idea of ♘c3 and a4, as noted in the comment to White's 48th move. Now Black gets another chance.

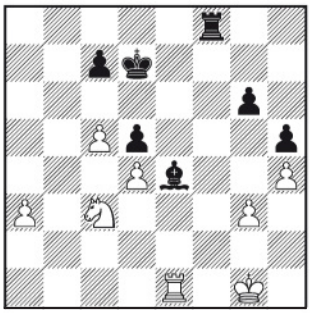
49...g6? With this logical move Black misses it.

49...♔c6! 50.♖xh5 ♖b3 creates enough counterplay to save the game. 51.♖g5 ♖d3 52.♔e2 ♖xa3 53.♔d2 *(53.♘e3 ♖a2+ 54.♔f1 ♖a1+ and White cannot get anywhere; 53.♖xg7? ♗f3+ 54.♔d2 ♖a2+ wins a piece.)* 53...♖a2+ 54.♔c3 *(54.♔e3 ♖a3+ and the king must go back.)* 54...♗f3! and Black should be able to draw.

50.♖e1? Forcing the bishop to e4 in order to attack it with ♘c3, but the immediate ♘c3 was stronger.

50.♘c3! c6 51.a4 and White should win, though it will still require precision and time.

50...♗e4 51.♘c3 ♖f8+ 52.♔g1



52...♖f3? The final mistake.

52...♔c6! was the saving chance, intending to use the d5-square for the king if there was an exchange on e4. With the white king cut off on g1 White cannot win. 53.♖e3 ♖f7 and Black just waits, as White cannot improve her position. The rook endgame after 54.♘xe4 dxe4 55.♖xe4 ♔d5 is drawn,

the black king is vastly superior and compensates for the two pawns. In fact, the king is so strong that even the pawn endgame after 56.♖f4 ♖xf4 57.gxf4 ♔xd4 is also drawn.

53.♘xe4 dxe4 54.♔g2! ♖xa3 55.♖xe4 Now White is winning as Black cannot keep the rook on the third rank to cut off the white king for ever.

55...♖d3 56.♔f2 c6 57.♔g2 Black is in *zugzwang*.

57...♖d1 This allows the white king to move forward.

57...♔c7 58.♖e7+ ♔d8 59.♖e6 wins more pawns; 57...♖a3 leaves the pawn on d4 without attention so White can activate the rook with 58.♖e5! ♖d3 59.♖g5 ♖xd4 60.♖xg6 and White wins. After 60...♖d5 61.♖g5 White will obtain two connected passed pawns on the kingside.

58.♔f3 ♖f1+ 59.♔e3 ♖f7 By keeping the rook on the f-file Black tries to prevent ♔f4-g5, but White can win in other ways.

60.♖f4 60.♖e5 with d5 next was another way.

60...♖g7 61.♔d3 ♔e6 62.♖f8 ♖a7 63.♔e4 ♖a1 64.♖d8 With threats like ♖d6 and $f4-g4. Not a perfect game by either player, but it's notable how an elite player like Firouzja missed so many chances in one game.

1-0

After this loss, Firouzja beat Wei Yi, he then lost to Vidit, then beat the World Champion, but then lost to Donchenko, before steadying the ship with a draw with Giri.

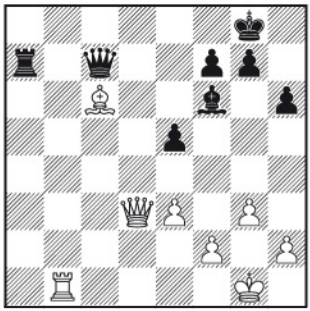
Firouzja managed to win one more game, against Nepomniachtchi, but at the end he was a point behind the winners.

GIRI'S MOMENTUM

Giri had his own momentum stopped in round seven. He started well by winning two games with the black pieces, in rounds one and three, beating Ju Wenjun and Donchenko. His win against Gukesh in round four was a masterclass in grandmaster technique.

Anish Giri – Gukesh D

86th Tata Steel Masters Wijk aan Zee NED (4.4)



Opposite-coloured bishops and an equal number of pawns on one wing do not guarantee a draw for Black. His bishop is very passive and White can attack the f7-pawn.

25.♗d5 ♕d8?! Passive defence.

25...e4! 26.♕xe4 *(or 26.♗xe4 ♖a1 exchanging the rooks.)* 26...♕e5! 27.♕d3 ♖a1 and, without rooks, Black's defence is easier.

26.h4! With heavy pieces it's more difficult for Black to defend. Now the threat is h5, when White can create threats along the b1-h7 diagonal.

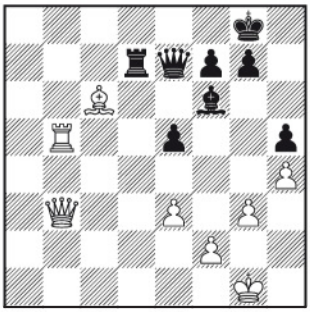
26...h5 Black correctly places the pawns on light squares, thus limiting the activity of the white bishop. He only needs to take care of the f7-pawn, which for now is well defended by the rook on the seventh rank. This means that at some point White will have to open the game on the kingside to make progress.

27.♖b5 Intending ♕b3.

27...♖d7? 27...♖a5! was again the correct way. Black needs to exchange rooks as that eases his defence even if he loses a pawn. After 28.♖xa5 ♕xa5 29.♕c4 ♕a7 30.♕c8+ ♔h7 31.♕f5+ ♔g8 32.♕xh5 ♕d7 Black has lost a pawn, but has good drawing chances.

28.♕b3 White is winning now, but Giri misses the decisive blow on the next move.

28...♕e7 29.♗c6?



29.♕b1! with the threat of ♕g6 was decisive. White would have won the pawn on h5 and kept the heavy pieces on the board.

29...♖d6 Now the game goes on - White is pressing hard, but is not winning.

30.♖b8+ ♖d8? Black wants to exchange queens, but he loses a pawn and damages his structure in the process, a price too high to pay.

30...♔h7 was more resilient. After 31.♗e8 ♖e6 32.♗b5 ♕d6 *(32...♗xh4? doesn't work in view of 33.♗c4! ♖d6 34.♗xf7 ♗xg3 35.fxg3 ♕g5 36.♕c2+ g6 37.♗g8+ ♔h6 38.♕f2 and White wins.)* 33.♖c8 g6 giving up the pawn immediately is more resilient. *(33...♖e7?! 34.♖c6 ♕d8 (34...♕d2? 35.♗d3+ e4 36.♗xe4+! ♖xe4 37.♖xf6! is a nice combination that will leave White win an easily winning queen endgame after 37...gxf6 38.♕xf7+ ♔h6 39.♕xf6+ ♔h7 40.♕f5+ ♔g7 41.♕xe4)* 35.♗e2! Black needs to

Anish Giri

expose the king in order to defend the pawn on h5. 35...♔h6 36.♕c4 threatening ♖c8. 36...♕a5 37.♖a6! with the idea of ♕c8-h8 37...♕e1+ 38.♔g2 and White is winning as he has the threat of ♕c8-h8, but also ♗d3-e4, or ♗d3 and ♕e4.) 34.♗c4 ♖e7 35.♗xf7 ♖c7 36.♖g8 ♗g7 37.♖a8 ♖d7 White has won a pawn, but now the only weakness on g6 is more difficult to attack, so Black can hope to sit still and save the game, though in practice this task is almost impossible.

31.♖b7 ♕e6 32.♕xe6 fxe6 33.♗e4 Threatening ♗g6. Without the move ...g6 the pawn on h5 is a liability.

33...g5 Gukesh cannot avoid losing a pawn, so he tries to reduce the material.

34.♗h7+ ♔h8 35.hxg5 ♗xg5 36.♗g6 All Black's pawns are weak. If holding the draw one pawn down is feasible, doing so two pawns down is impossible and Black will end up two pawns down after losing the pawns on e6 and h5.

36...♖d1+ 36...h4 37.gxh4 ♗xh4 38.♖h7+ loses the bishop: this was the point of White's 34.♗h7, to force the black king onto the h-file.

37.♔g2 ♖d2 38.♔f1 h4 39.gxh4 ♗f6 40.♖f7 ♗g7 41.h5 Now White will go after the pawn on e6.

41...♖d8 Now White wins the second pawn immediately.

41...♔g8 would have made it more difficult for White to win the second pawn. 42.♔g2 *(42.♖e7 ♗f6! 43.♖xe6 ♗h4 is the trap that Black can hope for.)* 42...♖b2 43.♖e7 ♗h6 *(43...♖b6 44.♖e8+ ♗f8 45.h6 wins on the spot.; 43...♗f6 44.♖xe6 ♗h4 doesn't work this time in view of 45.h6!)* 44.♔f3 ♖b6 45.♔e4 ♗g5 46.♖d7 ♖b2 47.♔f3 threatening ♗f7xe6. 47...♖b6 48.♖h7 threatening ♔g4 and h6. 48...♖b4 49.♖c7 threatening ♖c6. 49...♖b6 50.♔g4 ♗h6 51.♖c5 and White wins the e5-pawn.

42.♖e7 The pawn on e6 cannot be defended.

42...♗f6 43.♖xe6 The rest of the game is White's demonstration how to move all his pieces up the board.

43...♖f8 44.♗f5 It seems that in this phase Giri relaxed a bit and for quite some time he doesn't make much progress.

44.♔g2 ♗h4 45.f3 ♗f6 46.♔g3 was more direct. After 46...♔g7 47.♔g4 ♔h6 48.♗e4 White would have saved a lot of time pushing back the black king from g5, as happened in the game.

44...♔g7 45.♔g2 ♔h6 46.♗g4 ♔g5 Black has activated the king and established some sort of blockade on the dark squares, but White is able to overcome this barricade.

47.♔g3 ♖f7 48.♖b6 ♖f8 49.♖b7 ♔h6 49...♖g8 50.♖f7 with the threat of f4.

50.♖a7 ♗g7 51.♗f3 ♖f5 52.♖b7 ♖f8 53.♗e4 ♖f6 54.♖d7 ♖f8 55.♖a7 ♖f6 56.♖a2 ♖f8 56...♔xh5? 57.f4 leads to an unexpected mate on the h-file, unless Black gives up the exchange.

57.♔g4 ♖f6 58.♗f5 ♖b6 59.♖a7 ♖c6 60.♔f3 ♖c4 Preventing ♔e4, but it cannot be prevented for long.

61.♗d3 ♖c6 62.♔e4 ♖f6 63.f3 ♗h8 64.♗c4 ♖b6 65.♗f7 ♗g7 65...♔g5 66.♖a1 ♔f6 67.♗c4 ♔g5 68.♖g1+ ♔h6 69.♔f5 and White has pushed the black king back, though some work still needs to be done, similar to the game.

66.♗g6 ♖b4+ 66...♖f6 is an instructive line: 67.♖e7 ♖f8 68.♗f7 ♔g5 69.♗e8 ♗h8 70.♖e6 threatening h6. 70...♗f6 71.h6! ♔xh6 72.♔f5 ♔g7 73.♗h5 and Black is in *zugzwang* - the bishop must move and then White obtains two connected passed pawns after 73...♗h4+ 74.♔xe5.

67.♔f5 ♖b3 67...♖b6 68.♖xg7! ♔xg7 69.♔xe5 wins for White.

68.♖a6! ♖b8 69.♗f7+ ♔h7 70.♔g5 The blockade has been overcome.

70...♗f8 71.♗g6+ ♔h8 72.♖e6 There are too many threats: ♖xe5, h6 or ♖e8.

1-0

Giri's crisis came with the missed win against Maghsoodloo in round six, which was exacerbated by the loss to Abdusattorov in round seven.

Nodirbek **Abdusattorov** - Anish **Giri**

86th Tata Steel Masters Wijk aan Zee NED (7.4)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 This was a surprise for Abdusattorov, but he managed to surprise his opponent in return by choosing a rare line on moves five and six.

3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.c4!? A rare choice, as it never caught on after Firouzja lost to Nepomniachtchi at the Madrid Candidates with it.

5...♗e7 5...♘c6 6.d3 ♘f6 7.d4 ♗e7 8.d5 ♘e5 was played in: 0-1 (35) Firouzja,A (2793)-Nepomniachtchi,I (2766) Madrid 2022. White was fine after the opening, but overextended himself in the middlegame.

6.♘c3 The alternative is 6.d4.

6...♘xc3 7.dxc3 0-0 8.♗d3 ♘d7 9.♗e3 ♘f6 9...♘c5!? 10.♗c2 White should keep both bishops. After *(10.♗xc5 dxc5 11.♕c2 may look threatening, but Black can play 11...g6! (11...h6 12.0-0-0 ♗d6 was also satisfactory for Black in the game: 1-0 (55) Jones,G (2652)-Zarubitski,V (2448) Chess.com INT 2022) 12.0-0-0 ♗d6 and White cannot really create an attack thanks to Black's firm control of the dark squares.)* 10...♖e8 11.♕d2 ♗f6 12.0-0-0 b6 13.h4 the position is quite unclear, similar to the positions that arise from the popular line 5.♘c3 ♘xc3 6.dxc3.

10.h3 b6 11.♕c2 ♗b7 12.0-0-0 h6 13.♖he1 White has free play and can use it to play on the kingside, while Black will bank on the solidity of his position.

13...♖e8 14.♗d4 14.♘d4, with the idea of ♘f5, was an interesting alternative. 14...♘d7 15.♘f5 ♘c5 16.♗xc5 *(or 16.♘xe7+ ♖xe7 17.♗h7+ ♔h8 18.♗f5 but Black can exchange the light-squared bishops after 18...♗c8)* 16...bxc5 17.f4 ♗f8 and both sides still hold their trumps - White wants to play on the kingside, but Black is extremely solid and without weaknesses.

14...c5 Forcing exchanges, but weakening the d6-pawn and the d5-square. This decision is objectively fine for some time, but the long-term weaknesses that it creates will be the source of Black's downfall. A good alternative was 14...♘d7.

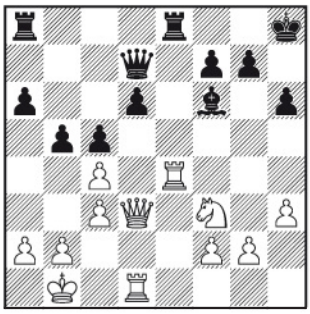
15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♗h7+ ♔h8 17.♗e4 White now will try to use the weaknesses on the d-file. Black is still solid, though.

17...♗xe4 18.♖xe4 ♕d7 19.♘d2 a6 Preparing ...b5.

If 19...♗g5 White won't allow the exchange of the light pieces and will play 20.f4 though, after 20...♖xe4 21.♕xe4 ♖e8 22.♕f3 ♗f6 23.♘e4, in spite of the position looking promising for White, Black can hold after 23...♗e7 24.♕d3 ♗f8 25.♘xd6 ♗xd6 26.♕xd6 ♕f5! Still, there was no need for Giri to go for these lines as during a game they don't look so pleasant for the defending side.

20.♔b1 ♗g5 20...b5 was possible, though White would just ignore the tension and play 21.♕d3 with the idea of ♘f1-e3.

21.♘f3 ♗f6 22.♕d3 b5?



Giri plays actively, but in the Petroff activity is not always the best choice. Now White obtains an advantage.

22...♖xe4 23.♕xe4 ♖d8 was patient, better and more in the spirit of the chosen opening. Black is passive, but his d6-pawn is well-defended.

23.♖xe8+ ♕xe8 24.♘d2! The knight is coming to e4.

24...♕e6 25.♘e4 ♗e7 26.♕d5 White has managed to establish domination in the centre and has a serious advantage.

26...♖d8 Black defends the pawn on d6.

27.cxb5 axb5 28.f4 Threatening f5.

28...♔g8 28...g6 29.g4 and White again threatens f5.

29.f5 ♕xd5 The endgame is prospectless for Black, but it was a choice between two evils.

29...♕c8 was somewhat better, though after 30.a3 ♕c7 31.♖d3 White is

dominating and can start creating threats on the kingside.

30.♖xd5 ♔f8 31.b4! Fixing Black's structure on the queenside.

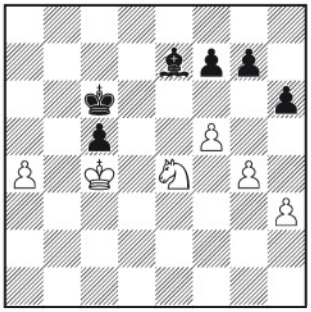
31...♔e8 32.♔b2 ♖d7 33.g4 The immediate 33.c4 was possible, but White strengthens his kingside first.

33...♔d8 34.c4! The decisive breakthrough.

34...bxc4 35.bxc5 dxc5 36.♖xd7+ ♔xd7 37.♔c3 White regains the pawn and is now winning thanks to the outside passed pawn.

37...♔c6 38.♔xc4 ♔b6 39.a4 ♔c6 40.♘f2 Repeating moves to pass the time control on move 40.

40...♗d8 41.♘e4 ♗e7



42.a5! The a-pawn is used to distract the black king from defending the d5-square, when White's king will go after Black's kingside pawns.

42...♗d8 43.a6 ♗e7 Black tries to stay still for as long as possible.

43...♔b6 44.♘d6

44.♘c3 ♗g5 45.♘b5 45.a7 ♔b7 46.♔xc5 ♔xa7 47.♔c6 and the king goes over to the kingside was another way.

45...♗e3 46.h4 ♔b6 47.a7 ♔b7 48.h5 ♔a8 49.♔d5 The king finally breaks through.

49...♔b7 50.♔d6 c4 51.♔d5 Limiting the counterplay based on the c-pawn.

51.♔e7 was also possible, though it required some precision, for example 51...♗xa7 52.♔xf7 ♗c5 53.g5! the only move to win! *(53.♔xg7? ♔b6 and suddenly the knight is short of squares as 54.♘c3 ♗d4+ picks up the knight and Black can draw now.)* 53...hxg5 54.f6 gxf6 55.h6 and the pawn promotes.

51...♗xa7 51...c3 52.♘xc3 ♗xa7 53.♔d6 is elementary.

52.♘xa7 c3 52...♔xa7 53.♔xc4 ♔b6 54.g5! is the standard motif in this pawn structure. 54...hxg5 *(54...f6 55.gxh6 gxh6 56.♔d5 White collects the f6-pawn and promotes his own f-pawn.)* 55.f6 gxf6 56.h6 promoting the h-pawn.

53.♘c6 c2 54.♘a5+ ♔c7 55.♘b3 White saves the piece and wins easily.

55...♔d7 56.g5 ♔e7 57.gxh6 gxh6 58.♔e5 f6+ 59.♔d5 ♔d7 60.♘c1

1-0

After this loss Giri seemed to have lost his drive, drawing with Wei Yi, Ding Liren and Firouzja, while his opponent continued in an enterprising style. Giri's tournament went back on track in the last two rounds, when he beat the locals van Foreest and Warmerdam, to tie for first place.

Abdusattorov lost in the next round to Nepomniachtchi, but completed his Dutch hattrick by beating van Foreest and Warmerdam. He also won a good game against the women's World Champion Ju Wenjun in round 11 to emerge as the sole leader.

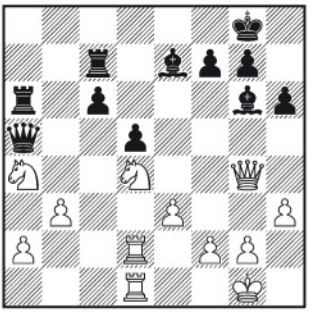
Gukesh had an even bigger number of successive results than Firouzja - from rounds two to seven he beat Wei Yi, lost to Ding Liren and Giri and then beat Nepomniachtchi, van

Foreest and Warmerdam. He added another win in round 10 when he beat Donchenko, for a total of 6.5 points.

Gukesh's win against the contender in the last two World Championship matches came thanks to a neat tactic.

Gukesh **D** - Ian **Nepomniachtchi**

86th Tata Steel Masters Wijk aan Zee NED (5.6)



White's extra pawn is compensated by Black's activity and the pair of bishops. However, Black's next move is a serious mistake.

34...♗b4? 34...♖a8 35.♘e6 ♖ca7! keeps things under control as White needs to retreat the knight.

34...h5 35.♕g3 ♗b4 was an improved version on the game, as without a queen on the fourth rank White doesn't have the same idea of ♘xc6. 36.♖e2 ♗e4 and the game goes on;

34...♗d6 35.♘e2 ♖ca7 is another option for Black.

35.♘xc6! Sharply spotted - Black loses more material now as after ♖xd5 the black queen can no longer defend the exposed bishop on b4.

35...♖cxc6 Or 35...♖axc6 36.♖xd5 ♖c5 37.♘xc5 ♗xc5 38.♖c1 and the two protected passed pawns on the queenside will decide the game.

36.♖xd5 h5 36...♗c5 37.♘xc5 ♖xc5 38.b4 wins the queen after 38...♖xd5 39.bxa5.

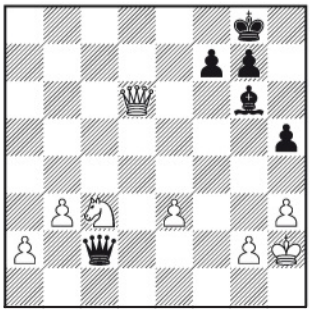
37.♕f4 ♖d6 37...♕xd5 38.♖xd5 ♗d6 White cannot move the queen in view of the mate after ...♖c1. Still, after 39.♖xd6 ♖xd6 40.♘c3, it is again the two connected passed pawns on the queenside that will win the game for White.

38.♖xd6 ♗xd6 39.♖xd6 ♖xd6 40.♕xd6 ♕e1+ 41.♔h2 ♕xf2 Maybe Black was hoping to create some play against White's king, but Gukesh keeps everything under control after this.

42.♘c3? A natural move, defending the pawn on a2 and controlling the e4-square, and thus preventing ...♗e4, but one that endangers the win.

42.♘c5 is the engine's preference, giving up the pawn on a2: 42...♕xa2 43.b4 ♕c4 44.♘d7! but combining threats against Black's king with the advance of the b-pawn, with a winning position.

42...♕c2?



Missing the best chance.

42...♕xe3 allowed Black to put up more resistance and probably save the game. After 43.♘d5 ♕f2 44.♘e7+ ♔h7 45.♘xg6 fxg6 46.a4 it seems the pawns should just march down the board, but after 46...♕a2! this is not easy to do. In fact, the engine claims that Black shouldn't lose now!

43.♕d4 Now White has everything under control.

43...♗d3 44.♘d5 ♗e4 45.♘f4 g6 45...g5 46.♕d8+ picks up the pawn on g5.

46.a4 ♗f3 47.♕d3 ♕f2 48.e4 Winning a third pawn.

48...♗d1 49.♘xg6

1-0

NEPOMNIACHTCHI'S TOURNAMENT

All the players who qualified for the Candidates had a good showing. Apart from the already-mentioned Gukesh and Firouzja, Praggnanandhaa was very solid, not losing a single game and winning two (against both World Champions) while Vidit's dream ended in the last round when he fell into Wei Yi's preparation.

Nepomniachtchi stayed within one point of the leaders after round 10 with a win over the World Champion.

Ian **Nepomniachtchi – Ding** Liren

86th Tata Steel Masters Wijk aan Zee NED (10.7)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.a4 Nepomniachtchi is the first to deviate from the two games played in Astana.

9.h3 was played in games 5 and 13. 9...♗b7 10.♗e3 *(10.a4 ♘a5 11.♗a2 c5 12.♗g5 h6 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.axb5 axb5 15.♘bd2* 1-0 (48) *Nepomniachtchi,I (2795)-Ding,L (2788) Astana m/5 2023)* 10...♘a5 11.♗c2 c5 12.♘bd2 ♖e8 13.a4 h6 ½-½ Nepomniachtchi,I (2795)-Ding,L (2788) Astana m/13 2023.

9...♗d7 10.♗a2!? A rare choice. The most common moves in this position are 10.♗c2, 10.♘bd2 and 10.♖e1.

10...h6 Commencing the standard regrouping: Black wants to play ...♖e8 and ...♗f8, but in order to stop ♗g5 or ♘g5, must play ...h6 first.

In their first duel after the World Championship Match, Nepomniachtchi comfortably beat Ding

10...b4 was played in a game between two young players: 11.h3 ♗e6 12.♗xe6 fxe6 13.♗e3 d5 and Black was OK after the opening in the game: 1-0 (98) Predke,A (2661)-Keymer,V (2721) Budva MNE 2023.

11.h3 ♖e8 12.♗e3 12.♖e1 gave White very little in another high-level game. After 12...♗f8 13.♘bd2 ♘e7 *(13...♗e6 14.♗b1 with the idea of d4 may give White some initiative.)* 14.♘f1 ♘g6 15.♘3h2 *(15.d4 ♕c8)* 15...♗e6 with the kingside secured Black exchanges the light-squared bishops. 16.♗xe6 *(16.♗b1?! d5 is just great for Black: all White did was take his forces backwards.)* 16...♖xe6 17.♘g4 d5 18.♘xf6+ ♖xf6 19.exd5 ½-½ (19) Svidler,P (2740)-Adams,M (2733) Rogaska Slatina 2011 19...♕xd5 20.♘e3 ♕c6 is indeed problem-free for Black.

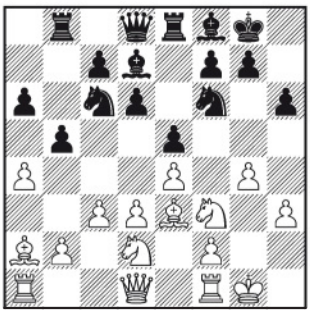
12...♖b8 Black wants to have ideas based on the vulnerability of the pawn on b2.

12...♗f8 was entirely possible, and has been played in a correspondence game. This game is notable because it saw White implement the g4-idea that we will see in the game. 13.♘bd2 ♘e7 14.g4!? here it is! The position is full of life, but the players (or their engines) found a way to a quick perpetual check after 14...g5 15.h4 ♗xg4

16.hxg5 hxg5 17.♕c1 ♗xf3 18.♘xf3 ♕d7 19.♘xg5 ♕g4+ 20.♔h2 ♕h5+ with a draw.

13.♘bd2 ♗f8 13...bxa4!? was more in line with Black's last move. 14.♕xa4 ♘b4 is a double attack on the queen and the pawn on d3. After 15.♕d1 ♘xd3 16.♕c2 the knight has no easy way out, so perhaps Ding didn't want to enter territory where his opponent must have been well-prepared. The lines are interesting, though: 16...♗b5 this looks the riskiest, but Black holds. *(16...♘xb2 17.♗b3 it looks as if the knight is lost, but Black has 17... a5! threatening ...a4. 18.♖xa5 c5! threatening ...c4. 19.♖a7 c4 20.♗a2 ♗e6 21.♖b1 ♘d3 22.♘xc4 ♘f4 and the knight has escaped!; 16...♘f4 was another option. 17.♗xf4 exf4 18.e5 dxe5 19.♘xe5 ♖f8 20.♘dc4 ♗d6 Black is solid here.)* 17.♖fd1 ♗f8 with ...♘f4 next, with an unclear position.

14.g4!



Nepomniachtchi shows that he is out for (some) revenge.

14...♗e6 It was possible to stop the advance of the g-pawn with 14...♘h7 15.axb5 axb5 16.♔h2 ♗e7, with an unclear middlegame ahead.

15.♗xe6 ♖xe6 16.axb5 axb5 17.g5 hxg5 18.♘xg5 ♖e8 19.♔h2 White opens the g-file. Objectively Black is fine; his king is safely defended, but the struggle is complex.

19...d5 Black strikes in the centre, following the classical rule of chess strategy that states that an attack on the wing should be met by an attack in the centre.

19...♕d7 is a calm attempt to win over the a-file that only an emotionless player can take. After 20.♖g1 ♖a8 21.♖xa8 ♖xa8 22.♕f3 things start to look threatening on the kingside, but after 22...♖a2 Black is perfectly fine!;

19...g6 20.♖g1 ♗g7 is a way to bolster Black's kingside. Play can continue 21.♕f3 b4 22.♖g2 bxc3 23.bxc3 ♕d7 24.♖ag1 introducing ♘xf7 ideas. 24...♖f8 25.h4 ♘e7 Black is solid, but it's unpleasant just to defend on the kingside.; 19...♘e7, with the idea of ...♘g6, was another sensible option for Black.

20.♖g1 d4 21.cxd4 exd4 Connected with the next move to exchange the bishops, but the bishop on f8 was a good defender of the g7-pawn. Still, it's not a bad decision.

21...♘xd4 was the alternative. 22.♘df3 *(22.♗xd4?! ♕xd4 hits both b2 and f2.)* 22... c5 23.♗xd4 exd4 24.e5 *(24.♖a7 this avoids the exchange sacrifice. 24...♖e7 25.♖xe7 ♕xe7 26.e5 ♘h5 with an unclear position.)* 24...♕c7 25.♔h1 ♖xe5! 26.♘xe5 ♕xe5 gives Black good compensation as White's king is the weaker one and Black has easy play with ...c4 next.

22.♗f4 ♗d6 23.♗g3 White wants to induce the exchange on g3 so that he can improve the position of his rook. Since the threat is f4, Black must oblige.

23...♗xg3+ 24.♖xg3 ♕d6 Black stops f4 and obtains good control over the dark squares.

25.♔g1 ♖a8 Black activates the rook, as it was doing nothing on the b-file.

26.♖xa8 ♖xa8 27.♕b3 A double attack on f7 and b5, but Black can parry it.

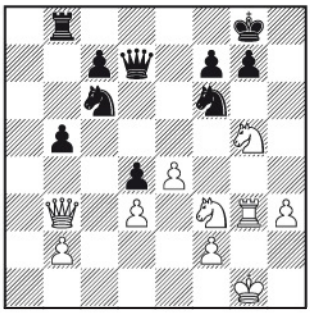
27...♕d7 One of the possible ways.

27...♘d8!? 28.♕xb5 ♕c6 29.♕xc6 ♘xc6 Black has sacrificed a pawn, but now he

has enough compensation thanks to the active rook on the queenside.

28.♘df3 28.♕xb5 ♘h5 29.♖g4 *(29.♖f3? ♖a5 loses the knight on g5.)* 29...♘f6 30.♖g3 ♘h5 leads to a repetition.

28...♖b8?!



A strange choice of a passive move by Ding.

28...♖a1+ 29.♔g2 ♘h5 30.♖g4 ♘a5 sending both knights on the rim may look weird, but it works for Black. Play becomes murky after 31.♕b4 f6! 32.♘e6 ♕xe6 33.♕xb5 ♕f7 34.b4 ♘b3 35.e5 when White has enough compensation for the piece;

28...♘d8 covering f7 and b5 and intending ...c5 was perhaps the most commonsense move in the position. 29.e5 is the most direct move, but Black has *(29.♘e5 ♕e7 forces the knight back as 30.f4?! (or 30.♕xb5 c6! 31.♘xc6 ♕d7 forces White to sacrifice a piece with 32.♘xf7 ♘xf7 33.♕c5 but he has just enough not to be worse here.) 30...♘h5 31.♖f3 c6 White's position is over-extended and he has no threats.)* 29...♕d5 *(*or the more complicated *29...♘h5 30.♖g4 c5* when the position remains tense*.)* 30.♕xd5 ♘xd5 31.♘xd4 ♖a2 32.♘xb5 ♖xb2 33.♘d4 c5 with ...♘f4 to come with sufficient counterplay.

29.♕c2?! White keeps some initiative after this move, but there was a much stronger option.

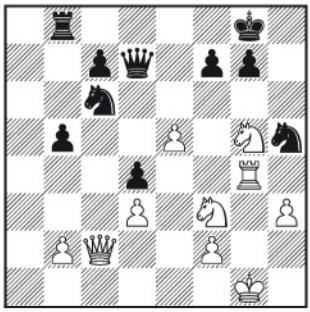
29.♘h4! was very strong, intending ♘f5. After 29...♘e5 30.♕d1! stops ...♘h5 and threatens f4.

29...♖b6 Black uses the rook to defend both the pawn on b5 and the knight on c6, thus dealing with the threat of ♕c5.

29...♖e8 30.♕c5 b4 was stronger, as Black intends ...♕d6 to get rid of the white queen. Now 31.♘h4 doesn't do much as Black has 31...♕d6 32.♕b5 *(*or *32.♕f5 ♘e7)* 32...♘e5 33.♘f5 ♕d7 and Black is fine, threatening ...♘h5 if White doesn't exchange queens.

30.e5 ♘h5 30...♘d5 31.♕e2 with the idea of ♕e4 gives White a serious attack.

31.♖g4 ♖b8?



That hapless rook again... Its movements in this game strongly resemble the aimless movements from the afore-mentioned game five in Astana.

31...♕d5! was the only move to stay in the game. 32.♕c1 f6! 33.exf6 ♘xf6 keeps the position unclear.

32.♕c5 White is winning now.

32...♖d8 This was Black's idea, but after White's next the attack is unstoppable.

33.♘e4 Threatening both ♘f6 and e6.

33...♕e6 34.♖h4 ♖d5 34...g6 35.♖xh5! gxh5 36.♘fg5 ♕g6 37.h4 is a beautiful

domination of the white pieces. Black cannot stop the threats of ♕e7 and ♘f6.

35.♕a3 g6 36.♘fg5 Black resigned as he cannot deal with the threats of ♖xh5, ♘f6 and ♕a8.

1-0

However, this was Nepomniachtchi's highest point, as in the penultimate round he lost to Firouzja, after facing 1.♘c3 by his fellow Candidate.

THE WORLD CHAMPIONS

The women's World Champion Ju Wenjun had a good showing. She scored 50% against the participants in the upcoming Candidates tournament (losing to Praggnanandhaa and beating Firouzja, with draws against Vidit, Nepomniachtchi and Gukesh) and also managed to draw with the reigning World Champion.

While it is a rare occurrence for the two reigning champions to meet in an official game, this was the first time in history that the women's Champion achieved a draw. She fought well and, despite having a negative result, this tournament was a rare opportunity for Ju Wenjun to face elite opposition on a regular basis in a single tournament, something which is a must for raising a player's level.

The World Champion had a bad event. In the pre-tournament interview, Ding said that he was feeling much better after an unspecified illness had kept him inactive since May last year. He started well, beating Gukesh with the black pieces in round three, but he immediately lost to Praggnanandhaa in the next one with the white pieces, a game where he was worse soon after the opening.

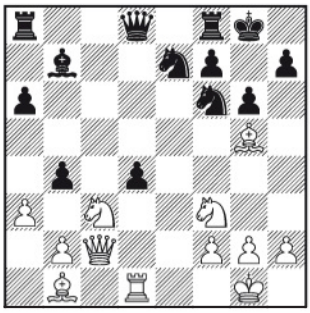
A series of draws against Maghsoodloo, Abdusattorov and Wei Yi followed,

The price of not playing for a long time: The forgotten World Champion, Ding Liren

before he lost two more games with the black pieces, to Firouzja and the game analysed above against Nepomniachtchi. In both games, it seemed that Ding couldn't withstand the tension.

Alireza Firouzja – Ding Liren

86th Tata Steel Masters Wijk aan Zee NED (8.6)



18.♖xd4 The game was sharp and calculated up to this point and here Black had to put a knight on the d-file or at least play ...♕e8.

18...♕c7?? Instead, Ding blunders a piece in one move. The following lines aren't easy, but should be navigated by a player like Ding.

18...♘fd5 19.♘xd5 ♗xd5 20.♗xe7 *(20.♕d3 f6 21.♗h6 ♖e8 22.♗a2 ♗xa2! 23.♖xd8 ♖axd8 the two rooks are in no way inferior to the queen.)* 20...♕xe7 21.♖xd5 ♖ac8 22.♕d1 bxa3 23.bxa3 ♕xa3 is fine for Black - the outside passed pawn in combination with a rook is not inferior to two light pieces;

18...♘ed5 19.♘e4 *(19.♗xf6 ♕xf6 20.♘xd5 ♗xd5 21.♖xd5 ♖ac8 transposes to the line after 18...♘fd5.)* *19...*♕e7 20.axb4 ♖ac8 is tense, but Black is not worse;

18...♕e8 19.axb4 ♘h5 20.♕d2 gives White a serious initiative, but Black can defend after 20...♗xf3 21.gxf3 ♘c6.

19.♘e4! Both the queen on c7 and the knight on f6 are attacked.

19...♕xc2 20.♘xf6+ ♔g7 21.♗xc2 White's two pieces against a rook give him a material advantage and Firouzja won in 43 moves.

1-0

Ding managed to win one more game, against Warmerdam, but even there he blundered a well-known stalemate in a rook endgame. He was lucky that Warmerdam gave him another chance later on. Still, one more win couldn't really improve the performance by much.

In today's world, long absences from practical play cannot go without damage to one's form. Ding paid the price for this absence and we can only hope that, with his health restored, he will return to his usual level and continue to play high-quality games.

The game of the tournament was played in round 11.

Wei Yi - Max **Warmerdam**

86th Tata Steel Masters Wijk aan Zee NED (11.2)

1.e4 e5 2.♗c4 ♘f6 3.d3 ♗c5 Another popular option is 3...c6, usually used by Petroff players, as Nepomniachtchi played it against Wei Yi in round nine in a game where he was fine after the opening, but later he lost. The move 3...♘c6 is an attempt to transpose to the Giuoco PIano after 4.♘f3 or to go after the bishop after 4.♘c3 ♘a5.

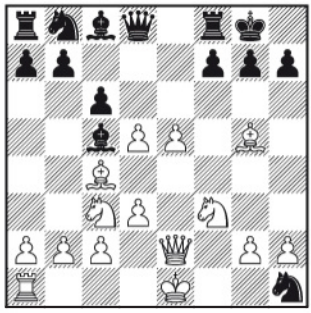
4.♘c3 c6 5.f4 The sharpest attempt, as otherwise Black obtains a solid position after ...d6.

5...d5 Black reacts in the centre to White's flank attack.

5...exf4 is an alternative, leading to a messy position after 6.e5 d5 7.exf6 ♕xf6 8.♕e2+ ♔d8. The threat is ...♖e8 so White doesn't have the time to save the piece. 9.♗xd5 cxd5 10.♕f3 with big complications in the game: 1-0 (40) Najer,E (2666)-Bulmaga,I (2438) Vrnjacka Banja 2023.

6.exd5 ♘g4 Black takes up the gauntlet, even though he must have known that White was prepared. Now the game becomes crazy. Saner alternatives were 6...0-0 or 6...cxd5.

7.♘f3 0-0 8.fxe5 ♘f2 9.♕e2 ♘xh1 10.♗g5



Black has won a full rook (!) but White has full compensation.

10...♕a5 The only move not to lose!

10...♗e7? 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.d6 ♕d7 13.0-0-0 White wins the knight on h1 and will have two monster pawns on e5 and d6 for the exchange, with a winning position;

10...♕e8? 11.d4 ♗b4 12.d6 is similar: the knight is lost on h1 and the central pawns will decide the game.

11.d6 The central pawns are White's compensation.

11...♗g4 12.♗e7 It was also possible to castle long.

12...♘d7 Black speeds up his development.

12...♗a3!? was a curious tactical shot. White has several options, all leading to positions that are difficult to assess. 13.♗xf8 *(13.0-0-0 is another option. After 13...♕xc3 14.bxa3 ♘d7 15.♗xf8 ♖xf8 16.e6! the position is objectively equal, but the lines needed to be calculated are very complicated.)* 13...♗xb2 14.e6! ♗xc3+ 15.♔f1 ♗xe6 16.♗xe6 ♗xa1 17.♗e7!? *(17.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 18.♕e7+ ♔g8 19.♗xg7 ♗xg7 20.♕e6+ ♔f8 21.♕e7+ leads to a perpetual.)* 17...h6! stopping ♘g5. 18.♘g5! but not really! 18...hxg5: Black could also play moves like 18...♕b5 or 18...♕a3, in addition to some others, with all of them impossible to explain. 19.♕h5 fxe6 20.♕e8+ ♔h7 21.♕h5+ White has sacrificed almost all his pieces and now has to give a perpetual.

13.e6! It was possible to take the rook on f8, but White disregards material in this game as a matter of principle. Another option was to castle long.

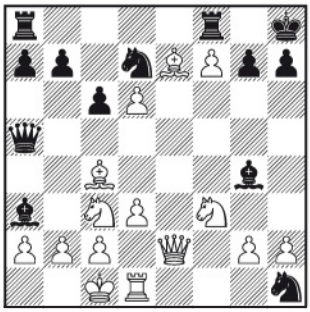
13...♗a3 Black desperately tries to create counterplay.

14.exf7+ All must go with tempo!

14.exd7 was more materialistic and also OK, but White loses some of the initiative after 14...♗xb2 15.♗xf8 ♗xc3+ 16.♔f1 ♖xf8 17.♕e8 ♕d8 18.♗xf7+ ♔h8 and the attack has come to a stop, though the balance is still on the board after 19.♖b1 b5 20.♔g1.

14...♔h8 14...♖xf7? loses to 15.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 16.♘g5+ ♕xg5 17.♗xg5 ♗xe2 18.bxa3 ♗h5 19.♗e3 when White will win the knight on h1 and will be a pawn up.

15.0-0-0



Now all White's pieces are developed.

15...♕xc3 16.bxa3 ♗xf3? Black is the first to blink in this incredibly complicated game. He cannot be blamed, especially as he only had one (!) move to stay in the game and that move is the last to come to mind in a position like this.

16...a5!! and Black is fine. It's mind-boggling to realise that Black is in time to create counterplay with ...b5-b4 in this position.

17.gxf3 ♘e5 18.♔b1 Getting away from the check on a3.

18...♕d4 18...♘xc4 19.dxc4 ♖xf7 20.d7 and the d-pawn promotes.

19.♖xh1 ♘xc4 20.dxc4 ♕b6+ 20...♖xf7 21.♖d1 ♕b6+ 22.♔c1 transposes to the game.

21.♔c1 ♖xf7 22.♖d1 The d6-pawn decides the game.

22...♖ff8 23.d7 ♖g8 Black tries to keep the last defence along the eighth rank, but this is too passive and White can simply improve the position.

24.♕e5 ♖ad8 25.f4 Threatening the slow knife-twisting f5-f6.

25...c5 26.♗xd8 ♕xd8 27.♕xc5 Black is completely paralysed, so he resigned.

1-0

This was the first win from the hat-trick that Wei Yi managed in the last three rounds. He also beat Ju Wenjun and, crucially, Vidit in the last round, to secure a share of first place.

Wei Yi rose to prominence quickly as a chess prodigy, being the youngest player to cross 2700, but. in spite of being only 24, in the past few years he has faded into the background. He wasn't getting any meaningful invitations and, while he was firmly in the top 20, he seemed neglected by both organisers and media. With the excellent result in Wijk, where he gained almost 15 points, he entered the top 10 and his win in the tie-breaks made him part of chess history as one of the winners of the Wijk aan Zee tournaments.

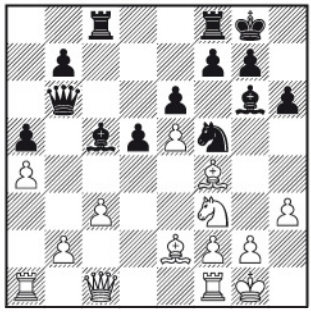
THE CHALLENGERS TOURNAMENT

The Challengers tournament saw numerous decisive games and a change of leaders. Pre-tournament favourite Hans Niemann was derailed after his solid start with three out of four by losing to the bright hope of Dutch chess, Eline Roebers.

The game was played after the first rest day and it coincided with Ju Wenjun's win against Firouzja. It's also worth noting that before this game Roebers had 0 points.

Eline **Roebers** - Hans **Niemann**

Tata Steel Challengers Wijk aan Zee NED (5.3)



Niemann chose the Caro-Kann in an attempt to curb Roebers's attacking flair. The opening was a success as Black obtained an advantage and now he continues with the planned central break.

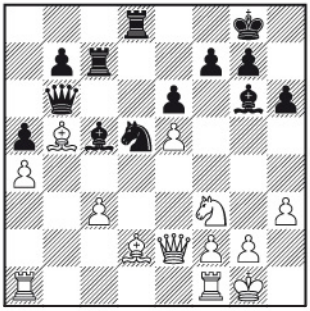
21...d4 22.♗b5 White cannot allow the opening of the c-file as after 22.cxd4? ♗xd4 the threats against the b2-pawn and ...♘g3 give Black a winning position.

22...♖fd8 23.♕e1 The queen gets away from the sensitive c-file.

23...dxc3 24.bxc3 ♘e7 The knight is transferred to d5, from where it will put pressure on the c3-pawn.

25.♕e2 ♘d5 26.♗d2 Black improved his position while White was defending. She has no compensation for the weak pawn on c3, but for the time being White's pieces are in safe positions and Black cannot easily break through.

26...♖c7?!



The turning moment in the game. Niemann decides to double the rooks on the c-file, but this won't bring benefits and will allow White to relieve the pressure.

26...♗h5! pins the knight on f3 and it was a more direct way to put even more pressure on White. The move allows 27.♖fb1, though Black keeps the advantage after 27...♕c7 when the threat is to capture the knight on f3 and then the pawn on e5.

27.♖fc1 ♖dc8 Continuing the plan, but letting White off the hook. It was better to return with the rook on c8: Black lost two tempi, but White cannot do much to improve her position.

28.♘e1 28.♖d1!? was an interesting alternative, threatening c4, followed by ♗f4 and ♖d6.

28...♗e7 Black opens the c-file to attack the pawn on c3.

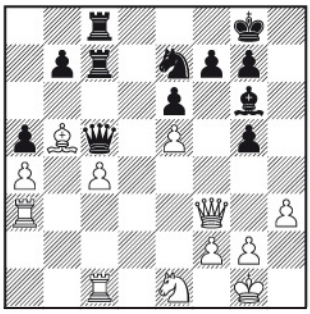
29.♕f3 29.c4 was also possible. 29...♘b4 30.♖d1 ♘c6 31.♗c3 with unclear play.

29...♗g5 Black exchanges the defender of the c3-pawn.

30.♗xg5 hxg5 31.♖a3 ♕c5 32.c4 White finally decided to move the c-pawn, though it was possible to keep it on c3 for the time being.

32.♖b3 ♘f4 attacks the pawn on e5. The only way to defend it is 33.♕e3, which cripples White's pawns after 33...♕xe3 34.fxe3, so it's understandable that Roebers didn't want to play like this. Still, after 34...♘d5 35.c4 ♘b4 36.♖d1 White has enough activity to hold the balance; for example, 36...♖c5 is met by the counter-attacking 37.♖d7

32...♘e7?



Niemann misses the best chance.

32...♗e4! 33.♕g3 ♘f4 wins the pawn on e5. After 34.♖e3 ♕xe5 White cannot use the pin with 35.f3 in view of 35...♘e2+ and Black wins the queen.

33.♕c3 Now White is back in the game.

33...♗f5 34.♘f3 ♘d5 Black sends the knight to f4.

34...g4 was a chance to get rid of the doubled g-pawn. After 35.hxg4 ♗xg4 36.♘g5 ♘g6 the position remains unclear.

35.♕b2 ♘f4 36.♖d1 White defends against ...♘d3 and occupies the d-file.

36...♕e7 Possible, but it seems that this is the moment when Niemann starts to lose the plot.

36...g4 37.hxg4 ♗xg4 38.♖d4 may look loose, but after 38...g5! the position remains tense.

37.♖d6 ♖d8? This is the real mistake, after which White is suddenly winning.

37...g4 was the correct way to continue. After 38.hxg4 ♗xg4 39.g3 ♗xf3 40.♖xf3, ♘g6 with the idea of ...♕g5: both sides have their chances.

38.♕d2! White takes over the d-file and obtains a winning positional advantage.

38...♖cc8 39.c5 The human move, cementing the rook on d6.

39.♖e3 is stronger, according to the engine, preventing ...♗e4, but this is too subtle.

39...f6? Black seems desperate for some counterplay, but this only weakens his position.

39...♗e4 was more resilient. After 40.♕xa5 ♗d5 his position is solid, and it's not easy for White to make progress on the queenside where she's a pawn up.

40.♗c4 40.exf6 ♕xf6 41.♖e3 was more direct, immediately piling up against the pawn on e6.

40...fxe5 41.♘xe5 White is positionally dominating. Black's kingside is full of weaknesses.

41...♔h7 42.♖e3 White's centralisation is imposing. With his next move, Black loses a piece, but it's difficult to suggest a move.

42...♘d5 42...♕f6 43.♕xa5 wins a pawn, while Black cannot do anything to improve his position.

43.♗xd5 ♖xd6 44.cxd6 ♕xd6 45.g4! Winning a piece.

45...♖c5 45...♗b1 46.♕e1 removes the queen from the pin on the d-file with tempo;

45...♗c2 46.♖c3 ♖xc3 47.♕xc3 and White remains a piece up as the capture on c2 is with check.

46.gxf5 ♖xd5 47.♕e2 exf5 48.♕h5+ ♕h6 48...♔g8 49.♕e8+ ♔h7 50.♘f3 with the threat of ♕h5 and ♖e8 and/or ♘g5 White wins quickly.

49.♕f7 With the queens on the board White's attack is decisive.

49...♖d1+ 50.♔h2 f4 51.♕f5+ ♔g8 52.♕c8+ ♔h7 53.♕c2+ ♔g8 54.♖c3 ♖d8 55.♕b3+ ♔h7 56.♘f7 White will be a full rook up, so Black resigned.

1-0

Niemann couldn't recover from the shock of this loss and he blundered in a drawn endgame in the next round against Marc'Andria Maurizzi, thus getting back to 50% and ending his dream of winning the tournament.

It was Maurizzi, the 16-year-old Corsican prodigy, the current World Under-20 Champion, who developed the winning pace needed to conquer the Challengers tournament. After the lucky win against Niemann he scored 4.5 out of his next 5 games to grab the lead. The style of his victories varied from the technical squeeze against Divya Deshmukh to the attacking demolition of Santos Latasa.

Marc'Andria **Maurizzi** - Jaime **Santos Latasa**

Tata Steel Challengers Wijk aan Zee NED (5.2)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.g3 The Catalan is one of White's most popular options against Black's ...e6 systems.

4...♗b4+ 5.♗d2 ♗e7 6.♗g2 ♘bd7 7.0-0 c6 8.b4 One of the many options White has at his disposal.

8...b6 9.a4 ♗b7 It was possible to castle first and keep the option of developing the bishop to a6 in one go. It's hard to imagine it at this point, but Black won't get to castle in this game!

10.a5?! Aggressive, but premature.

10...♗a6? Even in closed openings it is not advisable to lose time. This is a mistake that White masterfully takes advantage of.

10...dxc4! could have put White under serious pressure to prove compensation. After 11.a6 ♗c8 White needs to continue in sacrificial style with 12.b5! cxb5 13.♘a3 ♗xa6: White is three pawns down already. He can win an exchange after 14.♘e5 ♘xe5 15.♗xa8 ♕xa8 16.dxe5 but after 16...♘d7 17.♘xc4 ♗b7 18.♘d6+ ♗xd6 19.exd6 ♗d5 White is the one who needs to be more concerned with keeping the balance.

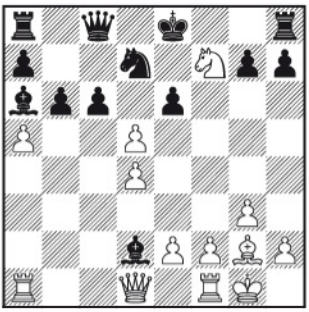
11.♘e5! Immediately targeting the weakened pawn on c6.

11...♕c8 11...♘xe5 isn't better. 12.dxe5 ♘e4 *(12...♘d7? 13.b5! cxb5 14.cxd5 exd5 15.♗xd5 ♖b8 16.axb6 ♕xb6 17.♗a5 and Black's position falls apart.)* 13.♗e3 with the threat of f3 antagonising the knight on e4.

12.♘c3 Threatening b5.

12...♗xb4 13.♘xd5! Maurizzi plays the Catalan as if it were a 19th-century Evans Gambit, sacrificing his way to get to the uncastled king.

13...♘xd5 14.cxd5 ♗xd2 15.♘xf7!



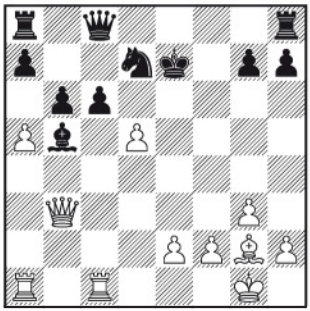
Here it comes. By now Black must have regretted his decision not to castle on move nine.

15...♔xf7 15...0-0 better late than never? Not really in this case, as 16.dxe6 ♗xa5 17.exd7 ♕xd7 18.♘e5 is winning for White.

16.dxe6+ ♔xe6 17.♕xd2 Black has a knight for a pawn, but his king is way too "centralised".

17...♔f7 18.♖fc1 White combines threats on the queenside with an attack on the king.

18...♗b5 19.♕a2+ ♔e7 20.♕a3+ ♔f7 21.♕b3+ ♔e7 22.d5!



Black's queenside falls apart now.

22...♘c5 23.♕e3+ ♔f7 24.♕f4+ ♔g8 25.axb6 axb6 26.♖xa8 ♕xa8 27.dxc6 Now the passed c-pawn will be unstoppable since, with the rook stuck on h8, Black doesn't have enough control of the eighth rank.

27...h5 28.c7 ♕c8 29.♖d1 The threat is ♖d8.

29...♗d7 30.♗c6 ♖h6 31.♗xd7 ♘xd7 32.♖xd7! Elegant finish. When Black takes the rook, ♕c4 with c8♕ next will win Black's queen. An impressive attacking game by the 16-year-old.

1-0

There was another prodigy on a hot streak in the Challengers. Leon Luke Mendonca

(17) had only 50% at half-stage of the tournament, but then scored 5.5 out of 6 to catch Maurizzi on 8.5 out of 11 before the last round.

THE FINISH

The stage was set for a nail-biting finish in the penultimate round.

Leaders Abdusattorov and Maurizzi both lost.

The Uzbek player lost to direct competitor Vidit, allowing the latter to join him in the lead. Giri took advantage of a horrendous blunder by van Foreest to join the leaders, while Gukesh blundered into a threefold repetition in a winning position against Praggnanandhaa, which kept him in the leaders' group but robbed him of the single lead. Wei Yi won a second game in a row, beating Ju Wenjun, to complete a five-way (!) tie for first before the last round.

The last round was to resolve everything.

It turned out to be one of the most bloodthirsty rounds. **All** the leaders won their games:

Gukesh refuted Maghsoodloo's incorrect sacrifice as Black in the Ragozin;

Wei Yi outprepared Vidit and converted the favourable middlegame with a forceful piece attack against Vidit's king;

Abdusattorov's risk took him from a position without compensation for the exchange to one with compensation against Donchenko and eventually the latter's weak king proved decisive;

Giri's early 7.g4 was the first step towards a winning attack against Warmerdam.

These results meant that a tie-break consisting of semi-final and final, played at blitz time controls (3 minutes + 2 seconds per move), was to be played to determine the winner of the tournament. The matches consisted of two blitz games followed by an Armageddon (where White got 2.5 minutes) if necessary.

The semi-final pairings were Abdusattorov-Wei Yi and Gukesh-Giri. The second pair perhaps had extra tension, because it was Gukesh who edged out Giri for the FIDE Circuit spot for the Candidates.

In the Challengers everything was decided by one move.

L'Ami kept things solid with White against Maurizzi and the game ended in an uneventful draw in 29 moves.

Mendonca faced Divya Deshmukh and things could not have been wilder.

Leon Luke Mendonca - Deshmukh Divya

Tata Steel Challengers Wijk aan Zee NED (13.5)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♘f6 The Four Knights Sicilian has become popular after it was discovered that in the line that happened in the game Black manages to obtain good chances.

6.♘xc6 In case of 6.♘db5 Black has the choice between entering the Sveshnikov Sicilian with 6...d6 *(or play 6...♗b4 and aim for a simpler position.)* 7.♗f4 e5 8.♗g5.

6...bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♕c7 The alternative is 8...♗b7.

9.f4 ♕b6 10.c4 ♗b4+ 11.♔e2 f5 12.exf6 ♘xf6 13.♗e3 ♕d8 14.♘d6+ ♗xd6 15.♕xd6 ♗b7 16.♔d1 The main alternative, also with a lot of theory, is 16.♖d1.

16...c5 Black sacrifices a pawn to open the long diagonal for the bishop.

17.♕xc5 ♗e4 18.♗e2 d6 An interesting alternative is 18...♖c8.

19.♕d4 0-0 20.b4? A clear case of forgotten preparation, but it's hard to say

what made Mendonca play this obviously bad move even if he was thinking on his own. Now Black obtains the better chances because White's king no longer has a safe haven on the queenside.

20.♔c1 was played by Vachier and is much better. After 20...♕c7 *(20...a5!? is a possible improvement for Black.)* 21.b3 was better for White in the game: 1-0 (33) Vachier Lagrave, M (2749) - Praggnanandhaa, R (2608) Krasnaya Polyana 2021 *(while 21.♖d1 may even be an improvement.)*

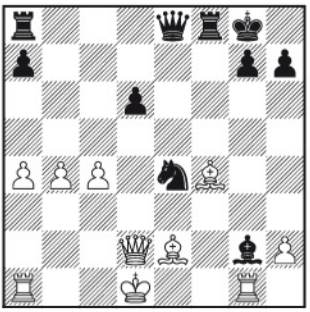
20...♕e8 Immediately targeting the a4-square, making White's next move forced.

21.a4 e5 Black opens the centre files in an attempt to get to White's king.

22.♕d2? This meets a precise refutation.

22.fxe5 dxe5 23.♕b2 was better, after 23...♖c8 24.♖a3 White can hope to consolidate with ♔c1, ♖c3 etc.

22...exf4 23.♗xf4 ♗xg2 24.♖g1 ♘e4!



The precise move that gives Black a decisive advantage.

25.♕d5+ ♔h8 Black threatens ...♘c3, so White doesn't have time to capture on g2.

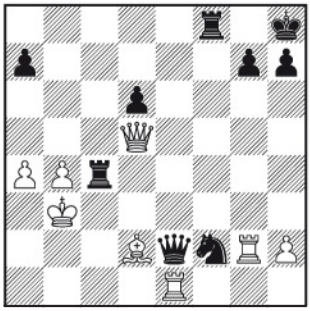
26.♔c2 ♘f2 26...♖xf4 27.♖xg2 ♘f2 was an alternative move-order that should have happened in the game.

27.♖xg2 ♕xe2+?? The move determined who would be the winner of the Challengers tournament. Instead of losing the game, White is now winning.

Taking the other bishop with 27...♖xf4 would have given Black a winning position thanks to the very weak white king.

28.♗d2 Suddenly Black is tied up on the second rank and the threat of ♖e1 cannot be parried.

28...♖ac8 29.♖e1 ♖xc4+ 30.♔b3



Black loses too much material, so she resigned.

1-0

Sometimes Fate decides who will achieve success and who won't. Perhaps after this game, Mendonca will consider adding "lucky" between his two given names.

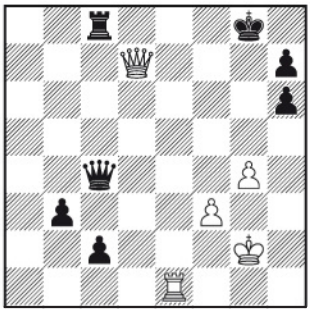
The victory in the Challengers brings a qualification to the next year's Masters, though this doesn't mean that the organisers cannot invite other players from the Challengers. With the prodigies Mendonca and Maurizzi on top, we may well see both of them invited next year to face the Masters.

THE TIE-BREAK

The match between Abdusattorov and Wei Yi started with a case of ¤winner's luck".

Wei Yi – Nodirbek **Abdusattorov**

Tata Steel Masters TB Wijk aan Zee NED (1.1)



Black is completely winning, but he must exert a bit of care because his king is open.

50...c1♕ This is fine, but it required a precise continuation.

50...♖f8 51.♖e7 ♕c3 was an alternative, when taking on h7 threatens nothing, while a check on e6 allows 52.♕e6+ ♔h8 and the king is safe on the long diagonal while Black threatens ...♕xf3 and ...c1♕.

51.♖xc1 ♕xc1?? The automatic response that throws the win away.

51...♕e2+! was necessary. The queen controls the vital e-file and after 52.♔g3 ♖xc1 the black king can escape the checks after 53.♕d8+ ♔f7 54.♕d7+ ♕e7 55.♕d5+ ♕e6 56.♕b7+ ♔g6 when the game is over.

52.♕e6+ Now White has a perpetual check and saves the game.

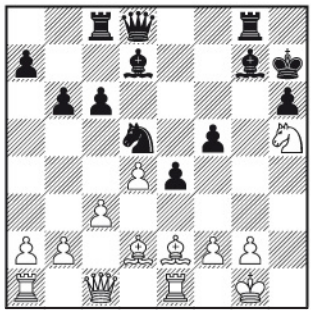
52...♔g7 53.♕e7+ ♔g6 54.♕e6+ ♔g7 55.♕e7+ ♔g8 56.♕e6+ ♔f8 57.♕f6+ ♔e8 58.♕e6+ ♔d8 59.♕d6+

½-½

After such a save it was clear that fortune favoured the Chinese player, though he also had to display some of his qualities.

Nodirbek **Abdusattorov** – Wei **Yi**

Tata Steel Masters TB Wijk aan Zee NED (1.2)



The Alekhine Defence, a rare guest at elite level, led to a sharp position with mutual chances. Now White commits a mistake that Black fails to take advantage of.

22.c4? Natural, as the knight was well-placed on d4, but it allows a tactical refutation.

22.♘xg7? was another natural move that wasn't good, because after 22...♖xg7 23.♗xh6 ♖g6 24.♗f4 ♕h4 25.♗g3 ♖xg3! 26.fxg3 ♕xg3 leads to a winning attack for Black;

22.g3 was necessary. The position remains tense after 22...♗f8 *(or 22...c5 23.♗c4 ♗e6)* 23.c4 ♗e8 24.cxd5 ♗xh5 25.♗xh5 cxd5 26.♕d1 ♕h4 with the threat of ...♖xg3 and a perpetual.

22...♘c7? Black misses his first chance.

22...♗xd4! 23.cxd5 ♕h4 would have given Wei Yi a winning attack: the threats of ...♖xg2 and ...♕xf2 or ...♗xf2 are impossible to parry.

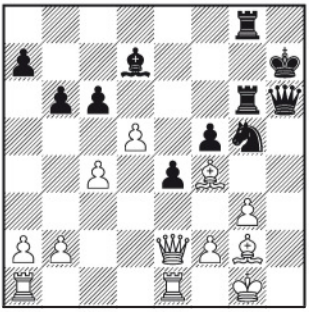
23.♘xg7 White eliminates the dangerous bishop and the game is unclear again.

23...♖xg7 24.♗xh6 ♖g6 25.♗f4 ♘e6 Black has compensation for the pawn as he can easily create threats on the kingside, which puts White on the defensive.

26.♕e3 ♕h4 27.♗g3 ♕f6 28.♗e5 ♕h4 29.g3 White avoids the repetition. Objectively he's doing all right, but in a blitz game the objective evaluation often means less than the subjective perception of the players.

29...♕h3 30.♗f1 ♕h5 31.♕e2 ♕h6 32.♗g2 ♖cg8 33.d5 It is only natural to play in the centre, but this forces the knight to go closer to the kingside.

33...♘g5 34.♗f4?



Here comes the mistake. White wants to limit the mobility of the knight by pinning it, but in fact it only gives more power to the planned check on h3.

34.♖ac1 was better, with the idea of having the defensive resource ♖c3 available, for example after 34...♘h3+ 35.♗xh3 ♕xh3 36.♕f1 ♕h5 37.♕g2 ♖g4 38.♖c3 and Black still has compensation, but White is solid on the kingside.

34...♘h3+ 35.♗xh3 ♕xh3 36.♖ad1 36.♕f1 ♕h4! shows the problem with White's 34th move - the bishop is subject to attack and after 37.♗e5 f4 Black's attack breaks through.

36...♖g4 It's hard to criticise this natural move, especially as the winning move was way too subtle for a blitz game.

36...♖8g7! was winning, freeing the g8-square for the king. This sounds too abstract and hard to understand, but the point is seen in the line 37.♖d2 *(37.dxc6 ♗xc6 only opens up ...e3 ideas for Black; 37.♕f1 ♕h4 38.♗e5 f4! wins for Black.)* 37...♔g8! with the idea of ...♖h7.

37.♕f1 ♕h5 37...♕h4 38.♕g2 and now the black rook on g4 is in the way as Black doesn't threaten ...♕xf4.

38.♗c7? The decisive mistake, as it allows Black to play the break he was hoping to anyway.

38.♕e2! was the only move - White prevents ...♖xf4 by pinning the rook on g4 to the queen on h5. In fact, Black is forced to repeat moves here with 38...♕h3 39.♕f1 ♕h5 40.♕e2 because there is no way to continue the attack.

38...f4! Of course. Now Black breaks through and wins.

39.♖xe4 fxg3 39...♖xg3+ 40.fxg3 ♖xg3+ was another way.

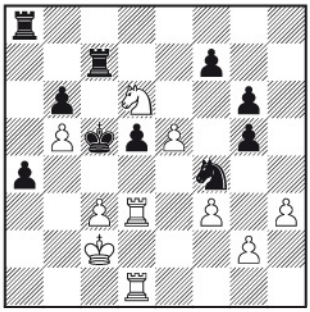
40.♖e7+ ♔h6 41.fxg3 ♖xg3+ 42.♗xg3 ♖xg3+ 43.♔f2 ♖f3+ 44.♔g1 White resigned as after 44.♔g1 ♖xf1+ 45.♖xf1 ♕g5+ wins the rook on e7.

0-1

The second tie-break started with a win for Giri with the black pieces. Gukesh outplayed his opponent in a position where he played against the IQP and obtained a winning position, but then, "blitz is blitz".

Gukesh **D** – Anish **Giri**

Tata Steel Masters TB Wijk aan Zee NED (1.1)



52.♖d4? A natural move that lets Black off the hook and puts White in danger!

52.♖3d2!, covering the g2-pawn and threatening g3, was winning. 52...f6 53.g3 fxe5 *(53...♘xh3 54.♖xd5#)* 54.gxf4 ♔xd6 55.♖xd5+ ♔e6 56.♖xe5+ leads to a winning double-rook endgame for White as he will be two pawns up after taking on g5 next.

52...f6! Now Black is out of trouble. Even more so, White must seek the only way not to lose!

53.♖b1? Now White loses.

53.♖xd5+! was the saving move. After 53...♘xd5 54.♘e4+ ♔xb5 55.♖xd5+ ♔c6 56.♖d6+ ♔b5 57.♖d5+ should lead to repetition as 57...♔a6?! 58.exf6 puts Black in danger - the a-pawn isn't going anywhere, while White plays ♖xg5 or ♘xg5 and concentrates on pushing the f-pawn further.

53...fxe5 54.♘e4+ dxe4 55.♖xe4 ♔d6 White has nothing for the piece.

56.♖a1 a3 57.♔b3 ♔e6 58.g3 ♘d3 59.♖e3 ♘c5+ 60.♔a2 ♖d7 61.♖ae1 ♖d2+

0-1

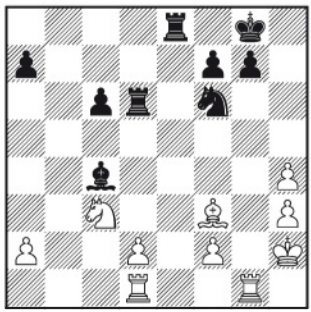
A lucky win for Giri, but from this moment onwards it was all Gukesh. He won with the black pieces in the next game, sharply taking over the initiative when given the chance and precisely calculating the complications. In the Armageddon he patiently outplayed Giri from a calm position that arose from the fianchetto variation of the Grunfeld.

It was an impressive comeback against one of the best players in the world.

The first game of the final was balanced and well-played by both players. It ended in a draw. The second game was also balanced for a long time, with Gukesh having more than enough compensation for the pawn in view of White's weak pawns. When the game transposed to an endgame, Wei Yi started to outplay his opponent.

Wei Yi – **Gukesh** D

Tata Steel Masters TB Wijk aan Zee NED (2.2)



28.♖g5 White wants to activate the rook along the fifth rank.

28...♔f8 28...♖ed8 would be likely to have led to simplifications and a draw. For example, 29.♖c5 ♗e6 30.♖xc6 ♖xd2 31.♖xd2 ♖xd2 32.♔g2 ♗xa2 - with a draw in sight.

29.♖c5 ♗d5 Black wants to avoid another pawn loss, but this move allows White to stabilise the position and obtain a bishop vs. knight in an open position. Black is

still fine after this, but the tide is turning in White's favour.

29...♗e6 30.♖xc6 ♖d3 31.♗g2 ♖ed8 was more active. Black will regain one pawn and his activity should suffice for a draw.

30.♘xd5 ♘xd5 31.d4 Now it's not so easy for Black to attack White's weaknesses.

31...♖f6 32.♖d3 ♘b4 The knight is forced back after White's next move.

32...♘f4, with the transfer of the knight to e6, was more forcing. The tactical justification is that after 33.♖a3 ♘e6 34.♖xc6 Black has 34...♖xf3! 35.♖xf3 ♘xd4 36.♖cc3 ♘xf3+ 37.♖xf3 ♖e2 with a drawn rook endgame.

33.♖b3! ♘d5 33...♘xa2? sends the knight offside and after 34.♗xc6 ♖c8 35.♗e4 White is winning thanks to the better coordination of his pieces and the passed pawn.

34.h5 Using the doubled pawn to fix Black's kingside, especially the pawn on g7.

34...g6? An exchange that undoubtedly favours White, who manages to exchange one of his doubled pawns.

34...♖d8 35.♔g3 ♘e7 was passive, but solid. Black wants to play ...♖fg6, to put pressure on White's pawn on d4.

35.hxg6 fxg6 36.♔g3 Without the doubled h-pawns White can now create a passed pawn on the kingside, making his extra pawn an important factor.

36...♘e7 A bit too late, but Black is already objectively lost.

37.♗e4 ♖d6 38.♖c4 White keeps the advantage after this.

38.♖f3+ ♔g7 39.♖e5, with an incredibly unpleasant pin on the e-file, was computer-like precision that is difficult to expect from the players in the last game of a gruelling tournament.

38...♖ed8 39.♖bb4 ♔f7 40.♔f3 White sends the king to take over the defence of the d-pawn.

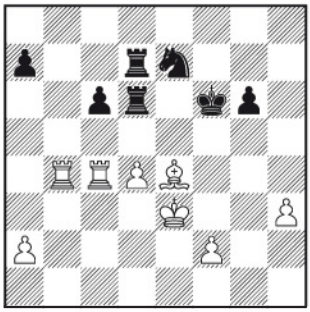
40.♖a4 ♖8d7 41.h4 is a typical improvement of White's position, pushing forward while Black can do little.

40...♔f6 40...♖e6!? was an interesting idea to stop White's plan, as now the king cannot cross the e-file in view of the check ...♘d5. 41.♖b7 ♔f6 42.♖xa7 wins a second pawn for White, but after 42...♖h8! Black's pieces get activated, which gives him good drawing chances.

41.♔e3? White follows his plan, but leaves the h-pawn unattended.

41.♖a4 was better, keeping the king on f3 from where it can go in either direction, e3 or g3.

41...♖8d7?



Black remains passive, something that is not characteristic of Gukesh. Possibly fatigue had something to do with his missing chances to become active, as they require more calculation.

41...♖h8! was natural. White cannot save the h3-pawn.

42.♖b8 Limiting the mobility of Black's rooks by taking control of the eighth rank.

The exchange of one pair of rooks is in White's favour as that would decrease the pressure on the d4-pawn.

42...♖e6 42...♘d5+ 43.♔f3 *(or 43.♗xd5 cxd5 44.♖f8+ ♔g7 45.♖cc8 ♖e6+ and Black should draw; 43.♔d3 ♘f4+ 44.♔e3 ♘d5+ leads nowhere.)* 43...♖e6 and compared to the game the knight is more active on d5.

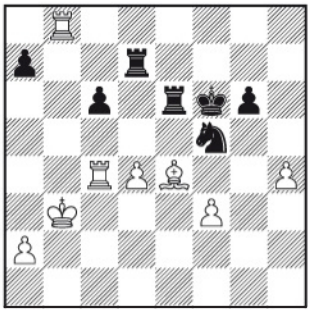
43.♔d3 ♖ed6 Black again banks on solidity and staying passive. Objectively it should draw, but, in such scenarios, there is always a moment where the passive side should vigorously become active to avoid a loss and after a long time spent being passive these moments are easily missed.

44.♖f8+ ♔g7 45.♖b8 ♔f6 46.♔c3 ♖e6 46...♘d5+!, again with similar ideas to the play after 42...♘d5, was called for. 47.♔b3 ♘e7 forces the king back to c3 or the rook back to b4.

47.f3 ♘d5+ 48.♔b3 ♘e7?! Now there is no pressure on the d4-pawn. Black wants to attack the pawn with the knight from f5, but this is not so effective.

48...♖h7! activates the rook and gives Black counter chances.

49.h4 ♘f5?



Continuing the plan, but even with so much lost time it was better to return to the set-up with doubled rooks on the d-file. Now White is winning.

The moment Gukesh gave up

49...♖ed6 50.♔c3 ♘d5+ was still the way to go for Black, in spite of the lost time.

50.♔c3 ♘d6 51.♗xc6 ♖c7 52.♖c5 Black lost a second pawn without compensation.

52...♖e3+ 53.♔d2 ♖a3 54.♗d5 Keeping everything under control, as the bishop defends both pawns on a2 and f3.

54...♖d7 55.♖c6 ♖a5 56.♗b3 ♔e7 57.♖g8 ♔f6 58.♖e8 Threatening ♖e6.

58...♔f5 A blunder, but the game was lost already.

59.♗e6+

1-0

Wei Yi described his victory as "the biggest achievement in my chess career" and will be back to defend his title next year.

The enterprising and uncompromising style of the player who went under the radar for way too long feels like a breath of fresh air compared to the more conservative approach at the top events. Together with the upcoming young generation such as Abdusattorov, Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa, to name just the teenagers who played in Wijk, we are guaranteed a spectacle every time these (and some other) players are invited to show their skill.

TATA STEEL CHESS - MASTERS 2024
FINAL RANKING AFTER 13 ROUNDS

Rk	SNo	Ti	Name	FED	RTG	TB1	TB2
1	10	GM	**Wei, Yi**	CHN	2740	8.5	1
2	6	GM	**Gukesh, D**	IND	2725	8.5	2
	9	GM	**Abdusattorov, Nodirbek**	UZB	2727	8.5	2
	12	GM	**Giri, Anish**	NED	2749	8.5	2
5	4	GM	**Vidit, Santosh Gujrathi**	IND	2742	7.5	0
	7	GM	**Praggnanandhaa, R**	IND	2743	7.5	0
	14	GM	**Firouzja, Alireza**	FRA	2759	7.5	0
8	13	GM	**Nepomniachtchi, Ian**	RUS	2769	6.5	0
9	11	GM	**Ding, Liren**	CHN	2780	6	0
10	1	GM	**Van Foreest, Jorden**	NED	2682	4.5	0
	3	GM	**Ju, Wenjun**	CHN	2549	4.5	0
	5	GM	**Donchenko, Alexander**	GER	2643	4.5	0
	8	GM	**Maghsoodloo, Parham**	IRI	2740	4.5	0
14	2	GM	**Warmerdam, Max**	NED	2625	4	0

TATA STEEL CHESS - CHALLENGERS 2024
FINAL RANKING AFTER 13 ROUNDS

Rk	SNo	Ti	Name	FED	RTG	TB1
1	10	GM	**Mendonca, Leon Luke**	IND	2608	9.5
2	6	GM	**Maurizzi, Marc`andria**	FRA	2572	9
	7	GM	**Dardha, Daniel**	BEL	2602	9
4	8	GM	**L'ami, Erwin**	NED	2627	8.5
	12	GM	**Korobov, Anton**	UKR	2663	8.5
6	3	GM	**Salem, A.R. Saleh**	UAE	2630	7.5
7	1	GM	**Niemann, Hans Moke**	USA	2692	7
	13	GM	**Santos Latasa, Jaime**	ESP	2615	7
9	9	GM	**Dronavalli, Harika**	IND	2500	5.5
	14	GM	**Vrolijk, Liam**	NED	2573	5.5
11	2	GM	**Yilmaz, Mustafa**	TUR	2665	5
12	4	IM	**Divya, Deshmukh**	IND	2420	4.5
13	11	IM	**Beukema, Stefan**	BEL	2428	2.5
14	5	IM	**Roebers, Eline**	NED	2381	2

CAPLIN HASTINGS CONGRESS 2023/24

AN INDIAN TRIUMPH IN HASTINGS

By IM Shaun Taulbut and James Pratt

The tradition of the Hastings chess tournament lives on. Covid affected the Congress in 2020 and 2021; this year things were returning to better health. Stuart Conquest, Honorary Life Member of the Hastings & St Leonard's Chess Club, is now in the hot seat as Director and succeeded in boosting the strength of the tournament with main sponsor Caplin Systems.

In the advert, the 97th *Caplin* Hastings International Chess Congress, 28th December to 7th January, included the Con Power Christmas and New Year Tournaments (Morning/Afternoon) and a weekend gathering with three sections. The event is sponsored by *Caplin Systems*, an international concern with offices in London, Singapore and New York, specialists in international trading technology. Their sponsorship has been instrumental in keeping this Hastings event a fixture in the chess calendar.

And the top group, the Masters? This year there were more grandmasters and international masters than in 2022/2023 and a slightly higher overall entry, including top-rated Maxime Lagarde of France and many overseas players.

The Masters was won by Indian Grandmaster Abhijeet Gupta with 7.5/9 followed by Pengxiang Zhang of China with 7/9.

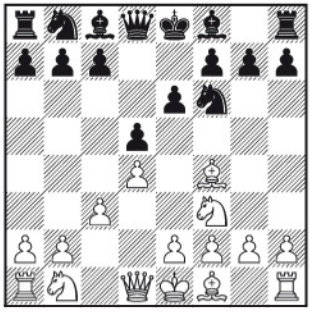
The Masters for 2022/3 saw an Englishman sharing second place, a further two tied for fifth and three coming in bunched 11th-18th. This time round, two Englishmen came 3rd= Ameet Ghasi and Shreyas Royal on 6.5/9 and we have to go down as far as 15th= to register another five which also included Lithuania's Sarunas Sulskis, the 2022/2023 winner. Scottish Junior Freddy Gordon scored 6/9. Bodhana Sivanandan scored 4/9.

The following win by Abhijeet Gupta featured an enterprising pawn sacrifice against the strong Scottish Junior Freddy Gordon.

Abhijeet Gupta – Frederick Gordon Waldhausen

Hastings Masters 2023–24 Hastings ENG (6.3)

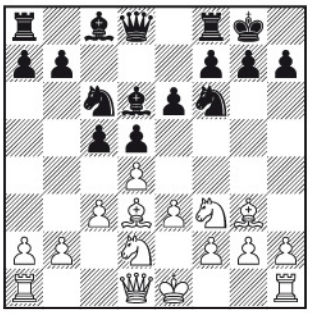
1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.c3 e6 4.♗f4



4...♗d6 5.e3 Allowing Black to double White's pawn if he wishes by exchanging bishops but then White will have a strong grip on e5.

5...0-0 5...♗xf4 6.exf4 is slightly better for White so Black plays to put pressure on d4.

6.♘bd2 c5 7.♗d3 ♘c6 8.♗g3



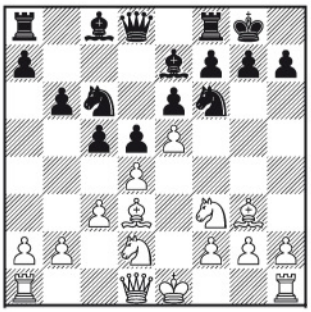
White retreats so he can easily recapture with the h-pawn if Black exchanges the dark-squared bishops

8...b6 More active was 8...♗xg3 9.hxg3 c4 10.♗c2 h6 when Black is slightly better.

9.e4 With the threat of e5; White takes the initiative after a quiet beginning.

9...♗e7 Exchanging with 9...dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♗xe4 ♗b7 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.♕e2 ♕c8 gives White the better game.

10.e5

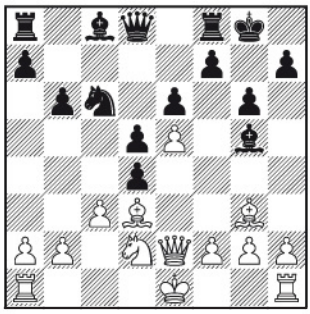


10...♘h5 Black prepares to exchange bishop for knight as the bishop cannot move.

11.♘g5 A surprise; White sacrifices a pawn for a kingside attack.

11...♗xg5 If 11...♘xg3 12.♗xh7+ ♔h8 13.♘xf7+ ♖xf7 14.hxg3 with a decisive attack down the h-file.

12.♕xh5 g6 13.♕e2 cxd4

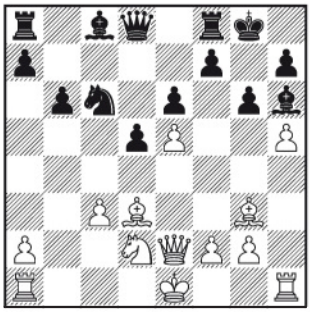


Black has won a pawn but White has in mind a bayonet attack.

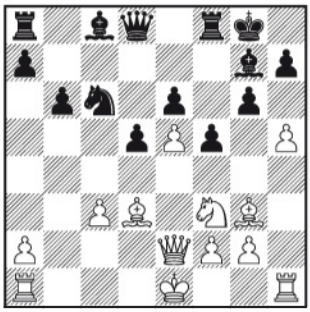
14.h4 ♗h6 More active was 14...♗xd2+ 15.♕xd2 dxc3 16.♕xc3 *(16.bxc3 ♕c7 17.h5 a5)* 16...♗b7 17.h5 ♕g5.

15.h5 dxc3 Worth consideration was 15...♗g7 16.cxd4 ♘xd4 17.♕e3 ♘c6 18.a3 ♗b7.

16.bxc3



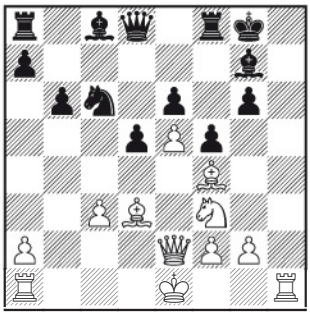
16...♗g7 17.♘f3 f5



Black tries to nullify White's attack. 17...♕c7 was also playable.

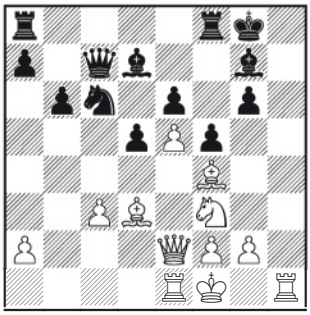
18.hxg6 18.exf6 ♕xf6 19.♖c1 e5.

18...hxg6 19.♗f4



Taking control of the dark g5 square which allows White to mount a kingside attack using:

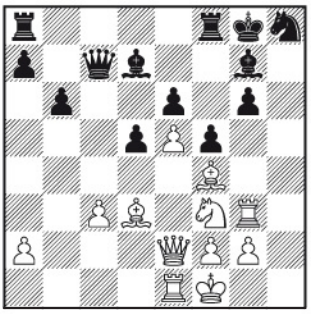
19...♕c7 20.♔f1 ♗d7 21.♖e1



Overprotecting e5.

21...♘d8 22.♖h3 ♘f7 Critical was 22...♕xc3 23.♘h4 ♗e8 24.♖g3 ♕d4 25.♕d2 ♘b7 26.♘xg6 ♗xg6 27.♖xg6 ♘c5 28.♗h6 ♖f7 29.♗xg7 ♕xd3+ 30.♕xd3 ♘xd3 31.♗f6+ ♔h7 32.♖g3 ♘xe1 *(32...♖xf6 33.exf6 ♘xe1 34.♖g7+ ♔h6 35.♔xe1)* 33.♖h3+ ♔g6 34.♖g3+ with perpetual check.

23.♖g3 ♘h8

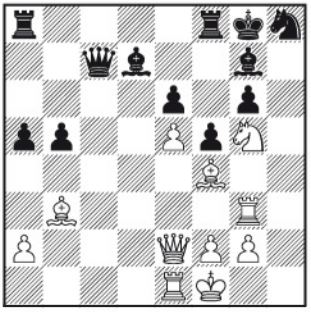


Passive; after 23...♕xc3 24.♖xg6 White has compensation for the pawn.

24.c4 The key move.

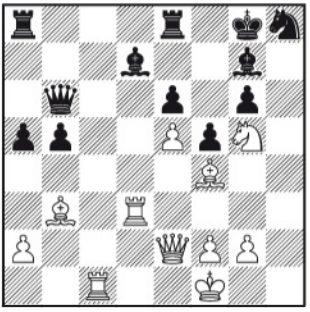
24...dxc4 25.♗xc4 The white bishop is very active now.

25...b5 26.♗b3 a5 27.♘g5



Attacking the weak pawn on e6 is the key to White's play.

27...♖fe8 28.♖c1 ♕b6 29.♖d3

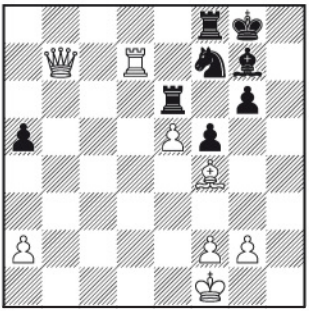


White has a big advantage, with the pressure on e6 and attacking the Black queen's bishop down the open d-file and c-file.

29...♕a7 30.♖cd1 30.♕d2 is very strong, eg 30...♖e7 31.♗e3 ♕b7 32.♖xd7 ♕xd7 33.♕xd7 or 33.♗xe6+.

30...♗c8 31.♖d8 ♕e7 32.♖xc8 ♖axc8 33.♗xe6+ ♕xe6 33...♔f8 34.♘h7#.

34.♘xe6 ♖xe6 35.♕xb5 ♘f7 36.♕b7 ♖f8 37.♖d7



37...g5 After 37...♗xe5 38.♗xe5 ♖xe5 39.♖xf7 ♖xf7 40.♕b8+ White wins a rook.

38.♖xf7 ♖xf7 39.♕c8+ ♗f8 40.♕xe6 gxf4 41.♕g6+ ♗g7 42.e6 ♖f6 43.♕e8+ ♖f8 44.♕d7 ♗f6 45.e7 ♗xe7 46.♕xe7 f3 47.♕g5+ ♔h7 48.♕h5+

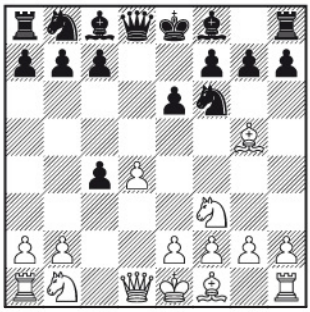
Now a quick win by Sulkis, the 2022/2023 winner.

1-0

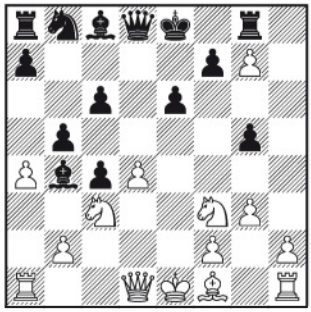
Šarūnas **Šulskis** - Max **Pert (1950)**

Hastings Masters 2023–24 Hastings ENG (1.1)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 dxc4



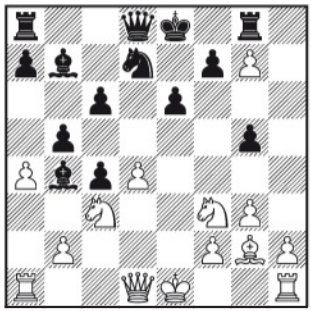
5.♘c3 c6 6.a4 ♗b4 7.e4 b5 8.e5 h6 9.exf6 hxg5 10.fxg7 ♖g8 11.g3



White develops his bishop on the long diagonal and this will attack the pawn on c6 in many variations.

11...♗b7 12.♗g2 ♘d7

Black wants to keep the knight out of e5.

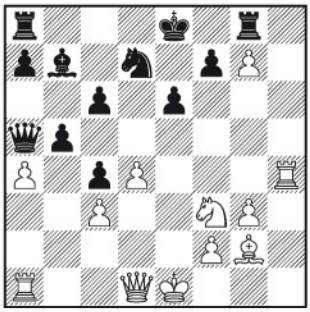


12...♖xg7 and, if 13.♘e5 f6 14.♕h5+ ♔e7 15.♘g6+ ♔d6 is satisfactory for Black and is best.

13.h4 gxh4 After 13...g4 14.♘g5 a6 15.♕xg4 ♖xg7 16.axb5 axb5 17.0-0 with a slight advantage to White.

14.♖xh4 White has strong play on the kingside now:

14...♗xc3+ 15.bxc3 ♕a5

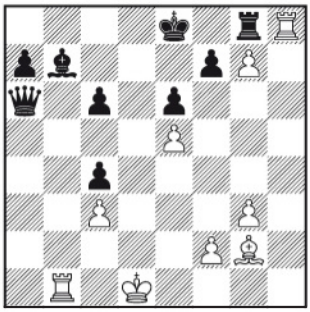


Now White has a winning advantage;

15...a6 is better, with the queen still able to defend the kingside.

16.axb5 ♕xb5 If 16...♕xc3+ 17.♘d2, uncovering the bishop, is winning.

17.♖b1 ♕a6 18.♘e5 ♘xe5 19.dxe5 ♖d8 20...♖xd1+ 21.♔xd1



White will capture the rook on g8 and then the g-pawn will queen unless Black plays 21..f6, which is the best try but loses to 22 ♖xg8+ ♔f7 23 ♖e8 when White will end up with two rooks and a bishop against thequeen, so Black resigned. (A black queen check on a4 is met by ♔e1.)

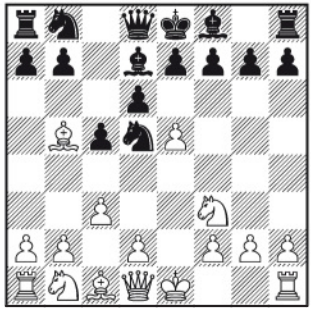
1-0

Shreyas Royal was in contention for a final grandmaster norm and played strongly but just missed out on the norm.

Cesar **Gimenez Menchon** - Shreyas **Royal**

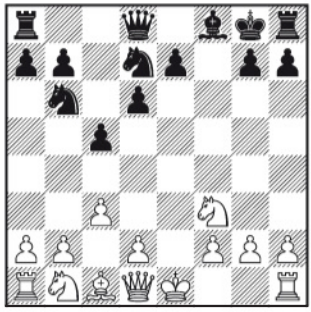
Hastings Masters 2023–24 Hastings ENG (2.14)

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♘f6 3.e5 ♘d5 4.♘f3 d6 5.♗b5+ ♗d7



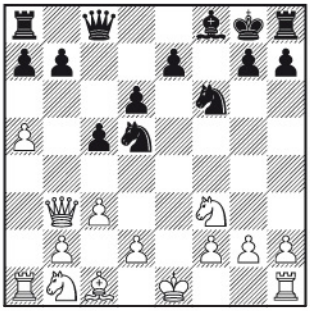
6.♗c4 ♘b6 7.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 8.e6+ ♔g8 After 8...♔xe6 The black king is in great danger, eg 9.♘g5+ ♔f6 10.♕f3+ ♔xg5 11.h4+ ♔g6 12.h5+ ♔h6 13.♕f7 e5 14.d3+ ♕g5 15.♗xg5+ ♔xg5 16.h6 g6 17.♘d2 ♗c6 18.f4+ exf4 19.♖h4 ♔xh4 20.♕xf4+ ♔h5 21.♔f2.

9.exd7 ♘8xd7



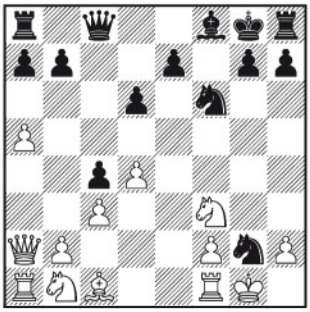
10.a4 10.d4 e6 11.0-0 ♕f6 12.♖e1 h6.

10...♘f6 11.a5 ♘bd5 12.♕b3 ♕c8



13.0-0 13.d3 h6 is more prosaic.

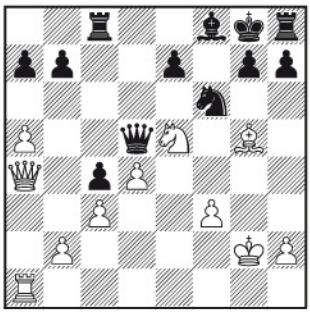
13...c4 14.♕a2 ♘f4 15.d4 ♘xg2



A strong blow wrecking the white kingside, as capturing the knight is met by…♕g4+.

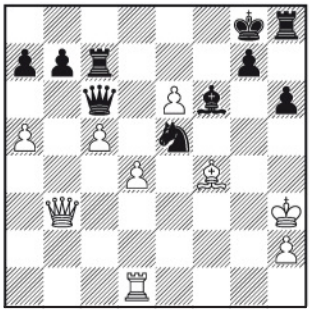
16.♔h1 16.h3 ♕xh3 17.♘g5 ♕g4 18.f3 ♕g3 19.♘e4 ♘xe4 *(19...♕g6 20.♕xc4+ d5 21.♘xf6+ gxf6 22.♕xd5+ ♔g7 23.♔f2; 19...♕h3)* 20.♕xc4+.

16...d5 17.♖g1 ♕f5 18.♘bd2 ♘f4 19.♖g5 ♕d3 20.♘e5 ♕e2 21.♘dxc4 ♘h3 22.♗e3 ♘xg5 23.♗xg5 dxc4 24.♔g2 ♖c8 25.♕a4 ♕e4+ 26.f3 ♕d5



27.♖d1 e6 28.b3 cxb3 29.c4 ♕d6 30.♕xb3 ♖c7 31.f4 ♗e7 32.f5 ♘d7 33.♗f4 ♗f6 34.fxe6 ♘xe5 35.c5 ♕c6+ 36.♔h3 h6

Black finally makes a safe square for the king on h7, which will also cover the queening square on e8 with his unmoved king's rook.



37.e7+ ♔h7 38.♕c2+ g6 39.♖f1 If 39.dxe5 ♕f3+ 40.♗g3 ♗xe7 is winning.

39...♖xe7 40.dxe5 ♗xe5 41.♗xe5 ♕e6+

0-1

HASTINGS MASTERS 2023-24 HASTINGS ENG THU 28TH DEC 2023 - SUN 7TH JAN 2024 LEADING FINAL ROUND 9 STANDINGS:						
Rk	SNo	Name	Ti	FED	RTG	TB1
1	2	Gupta, Abhijeet	GM	IND	2596	7.5
2	3	Zhang, Pengxiang	GM	CHN	2558	7
3	1	Lagarde, Maxime	GM	FRA	2640	6.5
	4	Jacobson, Brandon	GM	USA	2538	6.5
	5	Edouard, Romain	GM	FRA	2527	6.5
	6	Laurent-Paoli, Pierre	GM	FRA	2524	6.5
	8	Ghasi, Ameet K	IM	ENG	2509	6.5
	9	Petrov, Martin	GM	BUL	2501	6.5
	10	Sengupta, Deep	GM	IND	2501	6.5
	12	Gasanov, Eldar	GM	UKR	2487	6.5
	15	Royal, Shreyas	IM	ENG	2438	6.5
12	7	Mikhalevski, Victor	GM	ISR	2524	6
	25	Waldhausen Gordon, Frederick	FM	SCO	2338	6
	42	Bai, Xue		CHN	2099	6
15	11	Sulskis, Sarunas	GM	LTU	2490	5.5
	13	Wadsworth, Matthew J	IM	ENG	2448	5.5
	16	Willow, Jonah B	IM	ENG	2427	5.5
	17	Gallagher, Joseph G	GM	SUI	2427	5.5
	18	Boyer, Mahel	IM	FRA	2427	5.5
	19	Cherniaev, Alexander	GM	ENG	2381	5.5
	20	Derakhshani, Borna	FM	ENG	2380	5.5
	22	Unuk, Laura	IM	SLO	2345	5.5
	24	Fischer, Daniel	IM	SUI	2341	5.5
	27	Vestby-Ellingsen, Mads	IM	NOR	2329	5.5
	28	Rudd, Jack	IM	ENG	2314	5.5
	30	Bozinakis, Pavlos		GRE	2274	5.5
	31	Sarkar, Justin	IM	USA	2272	5.5
	32	Nielsen, Andre	FM	NOR	2239	5.5
	34	Boswell, Jacob Connor		ENG	2235	5.5
	37	Juknis, Paulius	CM	LTU	2148	5.5
31	14	Gormally, Daniel W	GM	ENG	2442	5
	21	Arkell, Keith C	GM	ENG	2371	5
	29	Lux, Hugo De Melo	FM	BRA	2311	5

FIDE Introduces overhaul to qualification paths for Candidates Tournament

By Milan Dinic

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) has recently announced a comprehensive set of changes to the qualification paths leading to the FIDE Candidates Tournament in 2026

These amendments, posted on FIDE's website at the end of January, are aimed at enhancing the competitive landscape, promoting player participation, and ensuring fair representation of top contenders in the prestigious tournament.

The most notable shift is the elimination of the automatic qualification for the runner-up from the World Championship match, a departure from previous cycles. Instead, the runner-up will now need to navigate the qualification process, adding a layer of complexity to the journey towards the Candidates Tournament.

To compensate for this alteration, FIDE has designated the World Championship Match 2024 as an eligible tournament for the FIDE Circuit. The runner-up in this match will receive special bonus FIDE Circuit points based on performance, introducing an innovative scoring system that reflects the competitive nature of the tournament.

In a move to prevent a last-minute scramble for qualification spots (such as the one exemplified by Alireza Firouzja's tournament in December in France, which FIDE decided not to rate), FIDE has introduced a six-month average rating rule for the highest-rated player. The spot reserved for the player with the highest FIDE rating will be determined by average rating over the preceding six months, eliminating the possibility of players relying on a "last chance" tournament in December. If the highest-rated player withdraws, the spot will be awarded to the second-highest rated player, with a provision to redirect the spot to FIDE Circuit 2025 if the second-highest player has already qualified.

The FIDE Circuit will now offer two qualifying spots for the 2026 Candidates Tournament, with the final Circuit score being the sum of a player's highest event scores, not exceeding seven event scores.

The rules for round-robin tournaments have been adjusted to award points to the top three places only, and a new bonus for sole first place without any tie-break criteria has been

Qualification Path	Candidates Tournament 2024		Candidates Tournament 2026	
	Event	Number of slots	Event	Number of slots
World Championship Match, Runner-up	2023	1	2024	0
World Cup	2023	3	2025	3
Grand Swiss	2023	2	2025	2
FIDE Circuit	2023	1	2024 2025	1 1
Rating	January 2024	1	January 2026	1*
TOTAL		8		8

*For the highest-rated player only; if the highest-rated player has qualified by any other path, the slot goes to FIDE Circuit 2025

added. Additionally, there is now an allowance for an unlimited number of tournaments in one country if the average rating of the top eight players in each event is 2650 or higher.

The FIDE World Cup 2025 and the FIDE Grand Swiss Tournament will provide three and two qualifying spots, respectively, for players who finish in the top positions. The cumulative effect of these changes is a dynamic and diverse qualification process, ensuring that eight players will emerge through distinct paths for the FIDE Candidates Tournament 2026.

This table highlights the difference between the existing and new qualification system for the Candidates:
FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich expressed confidence in the carefully considered changes, stating: "This reflects FIDE's commitment to evolving and refining the qualification process, promoting a dynamic and competitive chess environment." Grandmaster Pavel Tregubov, Secretary of FIDE's Global Strategy Commission, highlighted the thorough thought process behind the changes, emphasizing fairness and engagement.

The qualification paths to the Candidates have been a matter of debate among players for some time. In November, Grandmaster Emil Sutovsky – FIDE's CEO and the driving force in the international federation when it comes to issues such as this one – asked the public for suggestions on how to improve the qualification paths for the Candidates.

One of the suggestions was shared by GM Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, one of the top world players and an obvious pretender for a place among the Candidates. The Frenchman suggested that the rating spot should be determined by performance rating rather than an average rating during the qualification period. Fabiano Caruana seconded this, but it was not incorporated into the changes.

The Candidates tournaments have been around since 1950 and represent one of the most important and attractive chess events.

A NEW RECORD SET FOR THE YOUNGEST PERSON EVER TO BEAT A GRANDMASTER

Leonid Ivanovic (8)
Source: Belgrade Open

In a historic achievement, eight-year-old Leonid Ivanovic from Serbia has inscribed his name in chess history by becoming the first player under the age of nine to defeat a grandmaster in classical chess

The story was first shared on social media before being reported by Chess.com.

The remarkable feat unfolded during a six-round open tournament in Belgrade in January. The young chess prodigy scored an impressive four points, securing victories in three games, drawing two, and facing only one defeat. His outstanding performance, garnering a rating of 2056, added 81 points to his existing rating.

However, it was Ivanovic's victory in round two against 59-year-old Grandmaster Milko Popchev (who has a rating of 2193), that captured the attention of the chess community. In a closely contested match, Ivanovic emerged victorious, marking a historic moment.

According to research conducted by Chess.com, at the tender age of eight years, 11 months and seven days, Ivanovic has become the youngest player ever

to defeat a grandmaster in a classical tournament game.

Ivanovic's accomplishment is unparalleled as the previous record was held by Grandmaster Awonder Liang, who achieved this milestone at the age of nine years, three months and 20 days. Magnus Carlsen was 12 and a half when he scored his first win against a grandmaster.

Ivanovic's chess journey has been on an upward trajectory, with notable performances such as finishing fourth in the Under 8 category of the European Youth Chess Championship last September.

Currently holding a FIDE rating of 1865, Ivanovic is ranked fourth globally among players born in 2015 or later, ahead of prodigies such as UK's WCM Bodhana Sivanandan who stunned the community by winning the best woman prize in the European Blitz Championship.

Leonid Ivanovic's mother, Lidija, shared insights into her son's chess journey. Speaking to Chess.com she revealed that her son started playing chess in Novi Sad, where the 1990 Chess Olympiad was held. Ivanovic learned chess from his older brother and eventually joined the chess club at his elementary school. Recently making significant progress, Ivanovic now works with a personal coach twice a week.

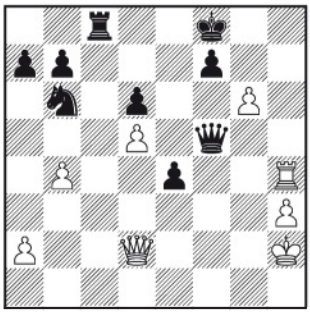
"He defeated three FMs and one GM, drew with one FM and one IM, and although he also experienced some losses, he feels confident playing against players with the highest chess titles. He looks forward to tough matches against opponents with high ratings and is motivated by recent good results," his mother Lidija said.

Ivanovic's achievement not only marks a personal triumph but also highlights the evolving landscape of young talents making waves in the world of chess.

Milko Popchev - Leonid Ivanovic

Novogodisnji rating ŠSB Belgrade, Serbia (2)

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.e3 0-0 6.♘ge2 ♘c6 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 cxd4 9.exd4 ♗f5 10.h3 h5 11.♗e3 ♕d7 12.♔h2 ♖ac8 13.b3 ♖fd8? 14.d5 ♘e5 15.♘d4 ♘d3?! 16.♕d2 ♘c5 17.♘xf5 ♕xf5 18.♖ad1 ♔h7 19.♖fe1 ♖e8 20.♗d4 ♘fd7?! 21.♗xg7 ♔xg7 22.b4 ♘a6 23.♘e4 ♘f6 24.♕b2 ♔f8 25.♗f1 ♔g8 26.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 27.♕d2 ♘b8 28.♖e4 ♘d7 29.♖de1 ♘e5 30.♗g2 ♖xc4 31.f4 ♖xe4 32.♖xe4 ♘d7 33.♕c2 h4? 34.g4 ♘b6 35.♕d2 ♔f8 36.g5 ♕f5 37.♖d4 ♖c8 38.♗e4 ♕d7 39.f5 gxf5 40.♗d3 e5 41.♖xh4 e4 42.♗xe4 fxe4 43.g6 ♕f5



44.g7+ ♔e7 45.♖g4 ♖g8 46.♖g5 ♕f6 47.♕g2 ♕f4+ 48.♔g1 e3 49.♔h1 f5 50.♖g6 ♔d7 51.♖e6 ♕d4 52.♖xd6+ ♔xd6 53.♕g6+ ♔c7 54.♕f7+ ♘d7 55.♕xg8 ♕e4+ 56.♔h2 ♕e5+ 57.♔g2 e2 58.♕e6 ♕xg7+ 59.♔f2 ♕e5 60.d6+ ♕xd6 61.♕c4+ ♕c6 62.♕f4+ ♕d6 63.♕c4+ ♔b6 64.♔xe2 ♕e5+ 65.♔f1 ♕b5

0-1

BCM Staff

KORCHNOI, KARPOV AND ME

By Grandmaster Raymond Keene OBE

I have been contacted by an enterprising 17-year-old German student, Keanu Siems, a resident of Switzerland, who chose Viktor Korchnoi as the topic for his college thesis. Part of the thesis was an interview with me, which I think deserves a wider audience. So, with my young friend's blessing, here is a summary of what I said about one of the strongest, and most controversial, of players never to have won the world championship.

Q: So my first question would be, how you came to be Korchnoi's second during that match in Baguio (city)?

RK: In 1974 I went to visit Korchnoi during the Candidates Final match against Karpov in his dacha (country house) outside Moscow. This was the match which crowned Karpov as world champion, when Fischer refused to defend in 1975. During the trip to the dacha I suggested to him an improvement on one of his earlier games against Karpov, and then he got to repeat the variation in his very next game as White and he obliterated Karpov in 19 moves. So, I think he began to realise that I could help him if he followed my advice. So that was the first time I met him but I didn't in any way suggest being a second of his because he was a Soviet Grandmaster and it would have been very strange for a Soviet Grandmaster to have non-Soviet seconds.

Q: Were you in any way involved in him fleeing from the Soviet Union?

RK: Absolutely not, I had absolutely nothing to do with that.

After his defection, I was competing in a tournament with him in Montreux in 1977, and I played a very interesting game with him, and I lost it of course. Anyway, after the game I was thinking about his Candidates quarter-final match and felt that he had not attracted particularly effective support. So I thought: well, I'll volunteer to become Korchnoi's second for the rest of the world championship cycle. I had just become a

grandmaster. I had just won the international tournament in Alicante in Spain, and I went to his room, knocked on the door and said: "I'd like to offer to become your second for the rest of the world championship cycle and I think that what I know about chess will help you to get the match". And he thought about it for a night and then agreed, and, after that, we worked together and the next match was against Polugaevsky, which he won overwhelmingly. The following match was against Spassky, which was a little bit tight but he still won by a very big margin. And then the final hurdle was against Karpov, and he lost that one, but he came very close to winning.

Korchnoi wrote in some of his books that even back then he felt like he was being treated worse than Karpov. He behaved aggressively towards the organizers, so it's not surprising. I started the match as his chief second, and then, half-way through, he made me the head of delegation as well. And, after that, he managed to focus on the chess instead of fighting the organizers. And that's when he clawed the score back to being equal. I don't think they intended to treat him badly but I think he antagonized them, for example by hiring people from the Ananda Marga sect, who were on bail for the attempted murder of an Indian diplomat.

I was the second for his match against Karpov, the match against Spassky and the match against Polugaevsky. And before that, in the quarter final, I think he had the Dutch Grandmaster Hans Ree, but that's because he was living in Holland at the time. But after that he moved to Switzerland, so there was no particular point in having a Dutch second.

Q: So how would you describe the team of Karpov and their behaviour towards your team? Because it is said they employed a lot of weird tactics.

RK: Well, they had a very aggressive head of delegation, Victor Davidovich Baturinsky, who'd been a military prosecutor in Stalin's army during the second world war, so he was quite a tough guy, but he did his job and his job was to help Karpov win and obviously the consequences for Karpov if he lost I think would have been far worse than for Korchnoi if he lost, because if Korchnoi lost he was living in the west, you know, tough luck you lost, but if Karpov lost they would have been very nasty to him, especially losing to a Soviet defector. So they had more to lose by losing than we did.

Q: Do you think there was any danger to Korchnoi's life if he had won? Because Tal said in the movie "Closing Gambit" that they might have even killed him if he won.

RK: I don't think so. I think it would have been pretty obvious if they had. There wouldn't have been many suspects. It's not like Agatha Christie's "Murder on the Orient Express" where there are 12 different suspects. In this case, there would have been one suspect and that would have been right.

Q: So you mentioned the Ananda Marga sect, how did Korchnoi find them?

RK: They found him. During the match in Baguio, we were besieged by cranks and lunatics offering to help. Mystics, Gurus, Parapsychologists. And that's because Korchnoi thought that Dr. Zukhar, who was working for Karpov, was a Parapsychologist. So, all the loonies in the Philippines went to Korchnoi to try and help him ward off the evil mind-bending rays of Dr. Zukhar. So, they were one of the groups who approached him. And, of course, I was totally opposed to this kind of thing and I wanted him to focus on the chess. But they were a bunch of charlatans and religious quacks, and they were on bail for the attempted murder of an Indian diplomat, which didn't help, certainly didn't endear them to the match organizers. I mean the whole thing was a dreadful disaster. But anyway I managed to keep him focused on chess in the second half and he very nearly won.

Q: And you got rid of the Ananda Marga people; how did you do that?

RK: I got them to leave town, but it didn't help because Korchnoi chose a dubious defensive system in the final game, which wasn't one I had recommended at all. And it just made life very easy for Karpov. But anyway Korchnoi rehired the Ananda Marga people in the 1981 match in Merano and after 3 games he got rid of them. They were completely useless and they were total crooks.

Q: So was it Michael Stean who suggested the c5 idea in the Pirc, combined with…b6?

RK: Yes, he did.

Q: So in general do you think, that you contributed the most useful ideas?

RK: I think that I contributed a lot of the useful ideas and Yasha Murey contributed a lot of useful ideas and Mike was very helpful, but some of his ideas about the openings were inappropriate and that was one of them. Korchnoi , at that moment, needed to play something solid with Black and then press with White in the next game because Karpov's stamina was giving out and all Korchnoi needed to do really was not to lose. I mean Victor was incredibly strong physically and he was much more physically fit than Karpov. And you can see the same thing happening in the 1984/85 match against Kasparov: When he was in a very long match, he started to faint physically. Whereas Korchnoi and Kasparov were both absolutely fine while Karpov was physically somewhat frail. And that showed when he became involved in a long match. I think my main contribution to the match was that when I took over as the head of delegation, Korchnoi started to win. And he managed to win 4 games while I was head of delegation, against just one earlier in the match. And he pulled back from being 4-1 down to 5-5 and that's when I was in charge of things, so I think what I did actually was a major contribution to the match. And if he hadn't played this poorly-timed opening in the last game, I think he would have won.

Q: What would you have suggested he should play?

RK: Probably the Open variation of the Ruy Lopez or maybe the Caro-Kann or even the French Defence: Karpov never beat him in the match with the French Defence. And I don't think he had beaten him in the 1974 match either when he played the French Defence. It was only when he started playing risky stuff as Black that he started to lose.

Q: And why do you think he thought that it was a good idea? Because to me the Pirc is also something I would consider to be a good opening at elite grandmaster level.

RK: No, I think it's okay, but not in that match situation. And not with that move. … c5 is playable in that position: you can play it, but it just makes White's life too simple. It doesn't pose big problems. White plays d5 and after that it's quite easy. I mean, okay, Black can resist: it's possible. There are lots of ways of playing it with Black. But it's a difficult variation for Black. In fact, afterwards I played it once myself in that position against a Romanian player called Ghindă in 1981. But in that situation in Baguio it was the wrong thing to do. And it wasn't so much that …c5 was wrong, it was the idea of playing ….b6, …Bb7 later on because the bishop on b7 is fighting against a granite wall of pawns on d5 and e4 and possibly even on f3. So if you're going to play …c5, then don't play …b6 and bishop-b7. Put the bishop on another square.

So …c5 is not so bad, but …b6 and bishop-b7 as a follow-up is, in my opinion, absolutely ridiculous. And he did play the Pirc against Karpov in one earlier game and he made a draw. So the Pirc isn't so bad, the Caro-Kann isn't so bad, the French isn't so bad. But that particular line of the Pirc struck me as very bad. Interestingly,

though, modern engines insist that, even after such moves, Black is still OK, as will be seen from my notes which follow.

Q: Do you think then that Korchnoi was trying to win with the black pieces?

RK: I think he was trying to win, which again I think was bad psychology at that point.

Q: Before the last game, didn't Dr. Euwe offer to you to adjourn the match?

RK: He did! He said, shall we call the match a draw and have a rematch next year? And the reasons I objected to that were, one, I think that the chess world was really excited by the situation, and you don't get to the Wimbledon final and, when it is deuce after 5 sets say let's call it a draw and let's come back next year; you don't do that. It's robbing the spectators of the sporting thrill of the match. And I thought it was morally wrong. And the second thing was that if I suggested it to Korchnoi, and he accepted, then in the rematch he might think: "Oh I threw away my best chance. Karpov was very tired. I've just beaten him 3 times in a row, why did I agree to that". But then if he turned it down and he got a bad position, he would be thinking all the time: "Oh I should have accepted the offer, I should have accepted the offer!" and then start to play badly. So I thought the best thing was to just reject the offer on moral grounds. It wasn't in the rules. It was a degradation or a dereliction of sporting duty to the fans worldwide. We would have come in for a lot of frenzied criticism. I mean if we had called the match off at this point, I think the world would have gone crazy, saying that we are cowards and wrong and it would have been very bad news. So I don't regret the decision at all.

Q: And why do you think Dr. Euwe proposed that to you?

RK: Because, I think, the Soviets proposed it to him. Because they were terrified of losing.

Q: And what do you think the reaction would have been if Karpov had lost?

RK: I think if they had called the match off, they would not have punished him, because that would have demoralized him for the rematch. I think they would have treated him very well and perhaps suggested to him that he improve his physical condition for the rematch, in case the rematch went on for a long time. You can see the pattern that, when Karpov started to lose in the match against Kasparov in 1985, exactly the same thing happened, and they called off the match and you saw there was a storm of worldwide protest when that happened. And that's what I wanted to avoid, getting a whole lot of criticism like: why has Korchnoi just won 3 games in a row, chickened out, and not tried to press his advantage? Everyone would have come out of it very badly. As indeed did Campomanes and Karpov, when they called off the match in 1985. And that didn't do them any good at all. Also, the chief arbiter, Lothar Schmid, left for the final game.

Q: Do you think the Soviets basically pulled all of the levers to ensure Karpov not losing?

RK: Yes! For example, they brought back Dr. Zukhar to the front row of the auditorium, which they had agreed not to do. I think if Lothar Schmid had been there, this would not have happened. But, unfortunately, the person that took over was Miroslav Filip, from Czechoslovakia. And of course at that time the Czechs were under the thumb of the Soviets, so they just did everything the Soviets told them. So Lothar Schmid leaving was unfortunate as well.

Q: So there were a lot of top Grandmasters playing tournaments in Czechoslovakia at that time. Did any of them offer support via phone calls or was it really just the 4 of you preparing for the games?

RK: We got phone calls, we got ideas. But usuall, it was just the core group. It

was Panno, Murey, me and Stean, and Korchnoi. Oscar Panno was there as well to help Korchnoi. By and large, we tended not to take too much notice of external suggestions.

Q: Korchnoi had a tradition of blaming his helpers when he lost. So did Korchnoi hold his grudge against you for long? You organized the match between him and Kasparov later, right?

RK: By the time when I organized the match between him and Kasparov, we were friends again. And in fact I was instrumental in getting the Soviet ban against him lifted, when we had the Manila congress of FIDÉ in 1983. I was the person to propose that the ban be officially lifted, and it was. And after that he was allowed to play against Soviet players in tournaments. So I think I did Korchnoi a lot of good.

Q: And in the later years, after 2000, have you had much contact with him or have you visited him in Switzerland?

RK: No. I never visited him in Switzerland, but he played in one tournament I organized in London. I think it was in 2008, I can't quite remember. It was a Staunton memorial at Simpson's in the Strand and he played in that, and he also played in a couple of tournaments in London, came to my house, had dinner and things. So I think he realized that his criticism had obviously been quite misguided. Especially when I got the Soviet ban lifted against him.

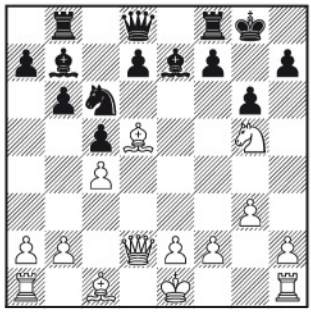
Cancelling the Soviet boycott involved trips to Moscow and tournaments around the world, getting Kasparov on my side and getting FIDÉ on my side, persuading the Russians that they had to do the right thing. And I think as a result of that I got the OBE from the Queen. You know, OBE is Officer of the British Empire. It is a British honour. And it was after that when I received the OBE from the Queen for services to chess and international diplomacy.

Viktor **Korchnoi** - Anatoly **Karpov** [E17]

Karpov - Korchnoi Candidates Final
Moscow URS (21), 11.11.1974

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.c4 ♗e7 6.♘c3 0-0 7.♕c2 c5 8.d5 exd5 9.♘g5 This was the crux of my improvement over earlier play, where Korchnoi had focused on creating a central pawn majority, even involving retreats like ♕c2 back to d1. My idea was to go straight for Black's king. Obviously, 9...h6 is met robustly with 10.h4, and similarly after 9...Na6, there follows 10.h4 h6 11.♗d2 ♘b4 12.♕b1 ♘e4 13. ♘gxe4 dxe4 14. a3 ♘c6 15.♗xe4.

9...♘c6 10.♘xd5 g6 11.♕d2 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 ♖b8??

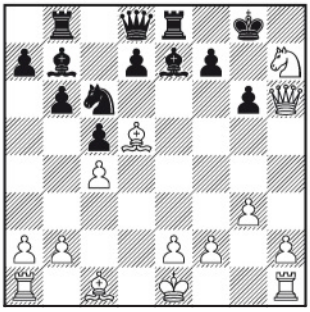


An inexplicable blunder by Karpov. As we shall see, the g5 knight must first be eliminated! Some 32 years later, Fontaine improved against Tkachiev with 12...♗xg5, a move Stockfish also promotes: 12...♗xg5! 13.♕xg5 ♖b8 14.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 15.♗f4 d6 16.♖d1 ♘b4 17.a3 ♘c2+ 18.♔f1 ♘d4 19.h4 ♗xd5 20.cxd5, when White is still more comfortable than Black, despite his wonderful knight entrenched on d4.

13.♘xh7!! One error. One devastating demonstration of the oversight that error constituted.

13...♖e8? If you scour a database of Karpov's games, I doubt that you will find any two successive blunders as those the soon-to-be-champion nervously offers up in this game. Perhaps it was the full adverse consequence of his previous move that brought about this rush of the normally ice-cold fluid that ran through his veins. The knight is, of course, out of the question, as a forced mate in eight follows: 13...♔xh7?? 14.♕h6+ ♔g8 15.♕xg6+! ♔h8 16.♕h5+ ♔g8 17.♗e4 f5 18.♗d5+ ♖f7 19.♕xf7+ ♔h8 20.♕h5+ ♔g7 21.♕h6 checkmate. Prosaically correct was 13...♘d4, but after 14...♘xf8 ♗xd5 15.cxd5 ♗xf8 16.O-O White enjoys a considerable advantage both materially and positionally.

14.♕h6!?



Even stronger was 14.♕f4 ♘e5 15.♕xe5 d6 16.♕e4 ♗xd5 17.♕xd5 ♔xh7 18.♕xf7+ ♔h8 19.♕xg6.

14...♘e5 15.♘g5 ♗xg5 16.♗xg5 ♕xg5 17.♕xg5 ♗xd5 18.0-0 One final fool's trap had been made available, namely 18.cxd5?? ♘f3+ turning the tables.

18...♗xc4 19.f4 Some analysts have claimed that Karpov, perhaps due to the emotional impact of being a contender for the world crown and losing in such a fashion, resigned prematurely. Although the following cannot be absolutely definitive, Stockfish makes a very strong case that such a view is without foundation. Karpov is well and truly busted. For example:

a) 19...♗xe2 20. fxe5 ♗xf1 21.♖xf1 ♖e6 22.h4 ♖be8 23. h5 a5 *(23...b5 24.♔g2 b4 25.♕f4 ♖f8 26. hxg6 ♖xg6 27. ♖h1)* 24. ♔g2 a4 25.♕h4 ♔g7 26.♕f4 ♖f8 27.♕g5;

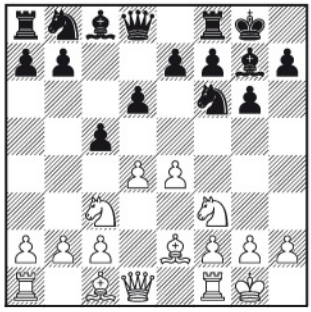
b) 19...♘c6 20.f5 ♖e5 21.♕f5 ♖xe5 22.♕xc4 ♘d4 23.♖xf5 ♘xf5 24.♕f4 ♖f8 25.e4 ♘g7 26.♕d6 ♖e8 27.♕xd7.

1-0

Anatoly **Karpov** - Viktor **Korchnoi [B08]**

Karpov - Korchnoi World Championship
Mat City of Baguio PHI (32), 17.10.1978

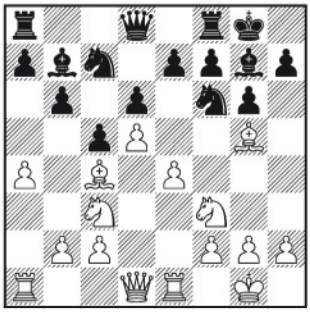
1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0-0 6.0-0 c5



Korchnoi varies from the standard 6...♗g4 which he had played in the eighteenth game. The text leads to a position more commonly reached by the move order 1.d4 c5 2.d5 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6 4.e4 g6 5.♘f3 ♗g7 6.O-O O-O - an unusual and rather dubious variation championed by the chief arbiter of the present match, Lothar Schmid. This variation produces an uncompromising struggle, which is what Korchnoi wanted. In retrospect, it might have been more circumspect to play a quieter defence with Black with a view to drawing this game and winning with White in game thirty-three. But after Karpov's recent collapse who can blame Korchnoi for trying to finish the match in the present game?

One of the best players in the world who never became world champion (some would argue, because of politics)

7.d5 ♘a6 8.♗f4 ♘c7 9.a4 b6 10.♖e1 ♗b7 11.♗c4 ♘h5 12.♗g5 ♘f6



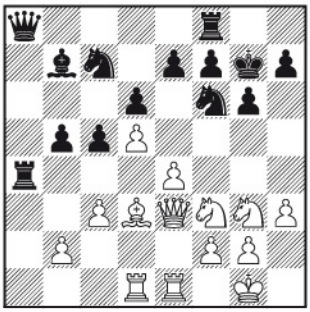
An admission that his last move was a mistake. If 12...h6 13.♗h4 g5 14.♘d2! is better for White. However, this is still a poor attempt to redress the balance. Stockfish considers there to be no problem with Black's position, after the two following alternatives to the text.

a) 12...♕d7 13.♖a3 ♗a6 14.♗a2 ♗b7 15.♕d2 a6 16.e5 b5 17.exd6 exd6;

b) 12...h6 13.♗c1 ♘f6 14.♘b5 ♔h7 15.♖a3 a6 16.♘xc7 ♕xc7. To human eyes, the legendary resilience of the engines is hard to fathom. My primary criticism of the black set-up was the misplaced bishop on b7, biting on the granite of White's central pawn constellation. Yet the engine not only wastes a tempo (...♗b7-a6) but replaces the bishop on b7 the very next move and postulates near-equality for Black!

13.♕d3 a6 14.♖ad1 ♖b8 15.h3 ♘d7 16.♕e3 ♗a8 17.♗h6 b5 Black has obtained his strategic objective of expanding on the queenside but it does not achieve very much. The play now revolves round White's attempt to achieve his strategic objective - the advance e4-e5. If he can play this move in favourable circumstances his space advantage will guarantee him the better game.

18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♗f1 ♘f6 20.axb5 axb5 21.♘e2 ♗b7 22.♘g3 ♖a8 23.c3 ♖a4 24.♗d3 ♕a8

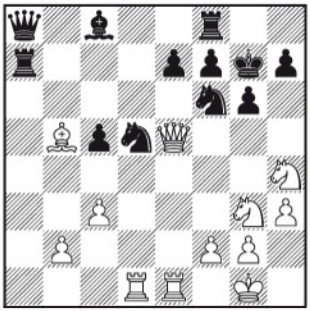


Black is trying to prevent e4-e5 by piling up on White's d5-pawn so that the advance of his e4-pawn will leave the d5-pawn too exposed. But White gets in e4-e5 anyway through a tactical trick. Better, therefore, was 24...♖e8, holding up the advance. Perhaps even slightly better were either 24...c4 or ...♔h8, according to Stockfish.

25.e5 dxe5 If Black had played 24...♔h8 he could now have refuted White's central thrust by 25. e4 ♘cxd5 but this now loses to the 26.exf6 check. It seems that Black could have played 25...♘fxd5, but then comes the crushing 26.♘h5+!! mating, e.g. ♔g8 28.♕h6 or 26...gxh5 27.♕g5+ ♔h8 28.♕h6 f5 29.♘g5. Korchnoi denies Karpov the satisfaction of finishing the match off in this elegant manner.

26.♕xe5 ♘cxd5 27.♗xb5 ♖a7 27...♖a5, trying to bolster up the weakling c5-pawn, may be an improvement.

28.♘h4 ♗c8



Even now Black could have resisted. 28...♗c8?? is a losing move. Yet after 28.♘h4, it can hardly even be said that Black is worse. Black must try: 28...♕c8! 29.♕g5 e6 30.c4 ♘f4 31.♕c5 *(31.♖e3 ♗a8 32.♘hf5+ exf5 33.♘xf5+ ♔g8 34.♕xf6 gxf5 35.h4 ♘h5 36.♕xf5 ♘g7)* 31...♖a2 32.♕d4 ♕c7 33.♘e2 ♘xe2+ 34.♖xe2 ♖fa8 35.♖ed2 ♖a1 36.b4 e5, when Black has equalised, according to Stockfish.

29.♗e2 ♗e6 30.c4 ♘b4 31.♕xc5 White is now a pawn up with the better position. Normally, Korchnoi would have resigned about now but in the circumstances he chooses to fight on to the bitter end. The final few moves represent a tragic climax to Korchnoi's bid for the world championship. Fortunately, he was too short of time to consider the pathos of the situation.

31...♕b8 32.♗f1 ♖c8 33.♕g5 ♔h8 34.♖d2 ♘c6 35.♕h6 ♖g8 36.♘f3 ♕f8 37.♕e3 ♔g7 38.♘g5 ♗d7 39.b4 ♕a8 40.b5 ♘a5 41.b6 ♖b7 The sealed move. Korchnoi resigned without resuming. And the world was left with another item for the database of what-could-have-beens.

1-0

The sealed move. **Korchnoi resigned** without resuming. And the world was left with another item for the database of what-could-have-beens.

Ray's 206th book, "Chess in the Year of the King", written in collaboration with former Reuters chess correspondent, Adam Black, appeared earlier this year. Now his 207th, "Napoleon and Goethe: The Touchstone of Genius" (which discusses their relationship with chess and explains how Ray used Napoleonic era battle strategies to develop his own chess style) has materialised, just in time to complement Ridley Scott's new epic biopic, 'Napoleon'. Both books are available from Amazon and Blackwell's.

QUOTES AND QUERIES

FROM DUNDEE TO WESTON-SUPER-MARE

By Alan Smith

6247 The first chess event to finish in 1924 started late in 1923. No, not Hastings but the Scottish Championship at Dundee. The holder, William Gibson, did not enter. Even so, the eight-player field included three former champions - Borthwick, Dr Macdonald and the columnist of the *Glasgow Herald*, Carrick Wardhaugh. There was no clear favourite, so a close tussle was in prospect. The first prize of £ 10 fell to Christopher Barclay Heath of 7 Blackness Road, Dundee, who scored +6-1 to finish a point clear of Dr Macdonald, with Simpson and Thoms tied for third place a further half point back. The decisive game between the two leaders came in round five and Heath defeated his rival, as he had the previous year. This time round Heath chose a surprise opening and was well rewarded when Dr Macdonald played to win his queen. White had underestimated black's counterplay.

Dr Macdonald - Christopher Barclay Heath

Scottish Championship, Dundee 1924

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗c5 4.c3 f5 This was first played in 1867, the brainchild of Dr Schliemann. **5.0–0** 5.d4 is more testing 5...fxe4 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.♘xe5 ♗d6 8.♕h5+ g6 9.♕e2! ♗f5! Mestel - Plaskett 1984.

5...fxe4 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.♘xe5 ♘f6 8.d4 exd3 9.♘xd3 ♗e7 10.♖e1 0–0 11.♕b3+ ♔h8 12.♘e5 ♘d5 13.c4 ♘f6 14.♘c3 14.c5! *BCM*.

14...♗c5 15.♗e3 ♗xe3 16.♖xe3 ♘g4 17.♖d1 Mackenzie described this as "venturesome play." and preferred 17.♘xg4 followed by ♖ae1.

17...♕h4! 18.♘g6+?! This looks tempting, but actually it forces black to play good moves.

18...hxg6 19.♖h3 ♕xh3! 20.gxh3 ♘xf2 21.♕a3 ♘xh3+ 22.♔g2 ♘f4+ 23.♔h1 ♗h3 24.♕e7 "24.♘e2 was better and might have given drawing chances". Mackenzie in the *Birmingham Post*.

24...♖ae8 25.♕h4+ ♔g8 26.♔g1 ♖f6 27.♕g3 ♖e2 28.♔h1 ♗g2+ 29.♔g1 ♘h3+ 30.♕xh3 ♗xh3 31.♘xe2 ♗g4 32.♖d8+ ♔f7 33.♘g3 ♖d6 34.♖xd6 cxd6 *Illustrated London News* 23rd February 1924 stopped here.

35.♔f2 ♔e6 36.♔e3 ♔e5 37.♘e4 d5 38.♘c5 d4+ 39.♔d2 b6 40.♘d3+ ♔e4 41.b4 ♗e6 42.b5 cxb5 43.cxb5 ♗xa2 44.♘b4 ♗c4 45.♘c6 ♗xb5 46.♘xa7 ♗d7

0–1

Dundee Courier and Argus, 2nd January 1924

Writing in Glasgow Herald 5th January 1924 Wardhaugh attributed Heath's victory thus: "He held the balance between cautiousness and recklessness better than any other competitor."

The Hastings congress started before Dundee , but finished afterwards. A mixed field battled it out over nine rounds. Reginald Michell was the fastest off the blocks with four wins. Euwe trailed by half a point and defeated Michell to assume the sole lead. Round

six saw the sixth drawn game, Mieses - Yates. All the games in rounds seven to nine were decisive.

Round seven saw the field bunch up again as Colle overran Euwe in just 25 moves. Euwe still led, but Maroczy, Colle and Yates were just half a point behind. Michell and Seitz trailed with +4-3. Wins for Euwe, Maroczy, Michell and Seitz changed the picture again.

Euwe duly clinched first prize defeating the luckless Price. Maroczy beat Blake and came second. The players tied third met each other. Yates beat Seitz and Colle overcame Michell to share third place. Euwe also won the two lightning tournaments. Meanwhile Morrison won the Premier Reserves, scoring+7=1-1

The life of a professional chess player can be like a merry-go-round. Edgar Colle was back at the board in February, taking part in a 14 player event at Merano. He won six games but also lost six.

The story of Merano was the good form of Grunfeld. Rubinstein unleashed an old idea in a new form and defeated Grunfeld in round 3. This became known as the Meran Variation. Grunfeld bounced back well to win a miniature against Takacs. The next round was pivotal. Grunfeld played the Meran to defeat Spielmann, while Rubinstein lost to Takacs.

Rudolf **Spielmann** - Ernst **Grunfeld**

Merano 1924

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.c4 c6 4.♘c3 e6 5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♗d3 dxc4 7.♗xc4 b5 8.♗d3 a6 9.0–0 c5 Improving on 9...♗b7 10.♕e2 c5 11.a4 c4?! 12.♗c2 b4 13.♘b1 ♕c7 14.♘bd2 ♖c8 15.b3 c3 16.♘c4 Schlechter - Perlis Ostend 1906.

10.a4 b4 11.♘e4 ♗b7 12.♘xf6+ 12.♘ed2 transposes back into Grunfeld - Rubinstein two rounds earlier.

12...♘xf6 13.b3 cxd4 14.♘xd4 van Vliet suggested 14.exd4 followed by ♗b2.

14...e5! Seventy years later Peter Wells in his book *The Complete Semi -Slav* only considered 14...♗e7 and 14...♗c5

15.♘f5 ♕d5 16.e4 16.f3 ♖d8 van Vliet.

16...♘xe4 17.♗c4 ♕xd1 18.♖xd1 ♘c3 19.♖e1 f6 20.♗b2 20.f4 e4!

20...g6 21.♘e3 0–0–0 22.♖ac1 ♗c5! 23.♗xc3 bxc3 24.♗xa6 ♗xe3 25.♗xb7+ ♔xb7 26.fxe3 ♖d3 27.♖e2 e4 28.♖ec2 ♖c8 29.♔f2 ♔b6 30.b4 f5 31.♔e2 ♖c7 32.♖b1 ♖cd7 33.♖bc1 ♖d2+ 34.♔f1 ♖xc2 35.♖xc2 ♖d3 36.♔e2 ♔c6 37.♖a2 ♔d5 38.a5 ♔c4 39.a6 ♔b3 40.♖a5 40.a7 does not work, as van Vliet pointed out 40...♔xa2! 41.a8=♕+ ♔b1 **40...♖d2+ 41.♔e1 ♖d8 42.a7 ♖a8 43.♖c5 ♖xa7 44.b5 ♖b7**

0–1

Sunday Times, 24th February 1924

Grunfeld was the clear leader and stayed so for the rest of the event. When he beat Patay in round seven he moved a point clear of five players. He scored five out of six in the remaining rounds and increased his lead to two points when Spielmann lost his final game. Rubinstein was third with +5=6 -2, while Przepiorka and Selesniev tied for fourth place. Tarrasch won one game, plus a win by default, and finished tenth.

Sir George Thomas opted for a quiet build-up to defending his British Championship title, declining an invite to play in New York in March. Yates stepped in to take his place, facing an imposing field - the three winners from Karlsbad 1923 Alekhine, Bogoljubow and Maroczy, plus Capablanca, Emanuel Lasker, Marshall, Reti, Tartakower, Janowski and Eduard Lasker. A double-round event, the

big chess tournament of the year. The organisers came up with an innovation, rounds were not played according to standard pairings but were decided by lot, in each half. This led to Reti having five whites in a row, immediately followed by five games with black!

Capablanca paid the price for his year out in 1923. He started with four draws, then lost to Reti. His first loss since 1916. Lasker led at half way with +5=5 a point ahead of Alekhine. Capablanca was third, Reti fourth with +5=1-4. Bogoljubow, Maroczy, Marshall and Tartakower all had 50%.

The second half quickly resolved into a battle between Lasker and Capablanca. The world champion won their second meeting, scoring +7=3, but Lasker maintained his lead, drawing with Alekhine and beating the other competitors. Marshall overtook Reti to claim fourth prize half a point ahead of him. Reti and Bogoljubow had the least draws, just three each. Reti won nine, lost eight, while Bogoljubow won 8 games and lost nine. Reti won the first brilliancy prize for his win against Bogoljubow, which was the miniature of the year.

Ten years on from St Petersburg 1914, the results of the top three were remarkably similar. Alekhine did better against Lasker and Capablanca, but still trailed them at a respectful distance.

The big events of the year had already come and gone, but there was still plenty of chess to be played. The second West of England C.A. congress was held in April. Max Euwe and Znosko Borovski were the visiting masters, facing a strong home field. Euwe started with two draws. Sir George Thomas led with +3=1, then lost to Spencer. After seven rounds Znosko Borovski had +6-1, just half a point ahead of Euwe, Sir George Thomas and Spencer. Euwe overtook the leader by defeating him in round eight, Sir George kept pace when he beat Duffield. Spencer fell back when he lost to Drewitt. The top four were paired in round nine. Euwe vanquished Spencer, but Sir George Thomas was unable to convert an edge and could only draw with Znosko Borovski.

Richard Lean was known for going his own way in the opening, the following inventive game helped him to a share of first place in the Open event.

Richard **Lean** - William Henry **Watts**

Weston-super-Mare 1924

1.♘c3 d5 2.e4 d4 3.♘ce2 3.♘b1 is an alternative.

3...e5 4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.c3 c5 6.b4!? d3? this does not work out well, but black should not try 6...cxb4? 7.cxd4 , while 6...♗g4 is met by 7.♕a4+.

7.♘g3 c4 8.♕a4+ ♗d7 9.b5 ♕b6? Black needed to try 9..a6 10.♕xc4 ♗xb5 11.♕b3 ♘d7, but not 11...♕c7? 12.♘f5!

10.♘f5! ♗xf5 not 10...♗xb5?? 11.♕xb5+.

11.exf5 ♘f6 12.♕xc4 e4 13.♘g5 0–0 14.♘xe4 14...♖e8 15.♗d3.

14...♘xe4 15.♕xe4 ♘d7 16.♕d3 ♖fe8+ 17.♗e2 ♘c5 18.♕c4 ♖e4 19.d4 ♖ae8 20.♗e2 ♘d7 21.0–0 ♗xh2+!? Three pawns down this was his best chance.

22.♔xh2 ♖h4+ 23.♔g1 ♕d6 24.f4 ♖xe3 25.♖ae1 ♕h6 26.♗h5!! ♖xe1 27.♕xf7+

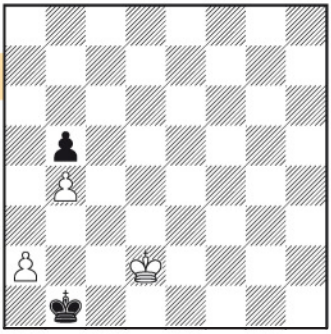
1–0

Birmingham Daily Post, 29th April 1924

Endgame Studies

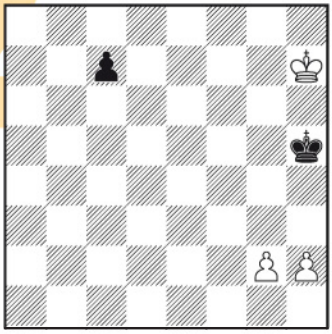
by Ian Watson
ian@irwatson.uk

1



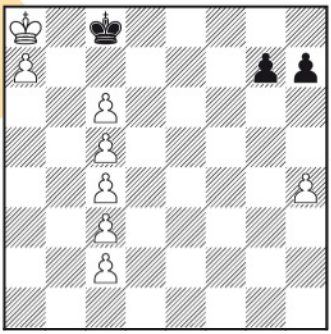
M. Zinar
Shakhmaty v SSSR 1987
WIN

2



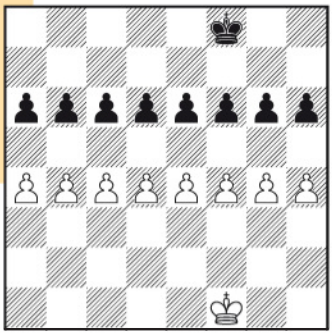
T. Gorgiev
Izvestia 1928
DRAW

3



V. Kovalenko
The Problemist 1992
DRAW

4



P. Cathignol
Themes 64. 1981
WIN

BEDTIME PAWN ENDINGS

A new book by the doyen of British endgame studies, who is also a former writer of this column - that merits a month's dedicated column. John Beasley has given his book the title "A Book of Bedtime Pawn Endings". I considered heading this month's column "Bedtime Pawn", but that wouldn't do justice to John - his is gentler, merely delicately hinting at a possible pun. The book is in John's fine style: carefully researched, accurately analysed, attractively presented, and the analysis lightened with humour and some whimsical puzzles.

Here are four of the studies in the book. The first is by the greatest modern master of the pawn ending, Mikhail Zinar. Its theme is known as 'festina lente'. The theme of the Gorgiev study is feints to deflect the Black king. The Kovalenko has a 23-move solution, but most of the play is forced, so it's not hard to solve.

The final study in the book is the Cathignol; alongside its solution, John poses a puzzle: How soon can you reach the diagram position from the game array? You might like to try to answer that in addition to solving the study.

John Beasley's book is available from Chess & Bridge (www.chess.co.uk) and its ISBN is 978-0-9555168-5-6.

I have a question for someone among our readers to research: there's a superb study in the book that is given as being by O. Frink from *The Chess Amateur* in 1927. It's almost the same position (although horizontally reflected) as one of my all-time favourite studies, by N Grigoriev from *Shakhmaty v SSSR* 1932, and the essence of the play is identical. Frink's has WKc6, WPh2, BKd3, BPf7; Grigoriev's has WKg6, WPa2, BKf3, BPc7. The solution to the Frink is **1.♔d5 f6 2.h4 ♔e3 3.h5 f5 4.h6 f4 5.h7 f3 6.h8♕ f2 7.♕e5+ ♔d3 8.♕b2 ♔e3 9.♕b5** winning. The Grigoriev's solution has an extra first move and is reflected. My question is, did Grigoriev not really compose his masterpiece? Was it all but fully anticipated? Perhaps even Frink's wasn't the earliest version - maybe both Grigoriev and Frink were building on earlier works? The answers might be known already, but not yet to me!

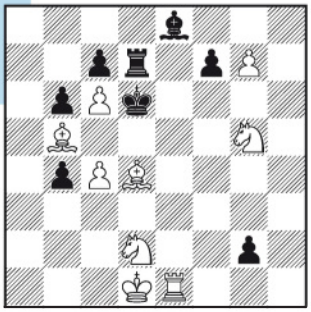
The solutions are on page 127.

PROBLEM WORLD

by Christopher Jones
cjajones1@yahoo.co.uk
Grandmaster of Chess Composition

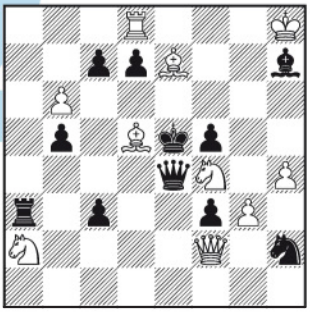
Solutions are given on page 126

1



David Shire (Canterbury)

2



Leonid Lyubashevsky, Leonid Makaronez and Fedir Kapustin (Israel/Ukraine)

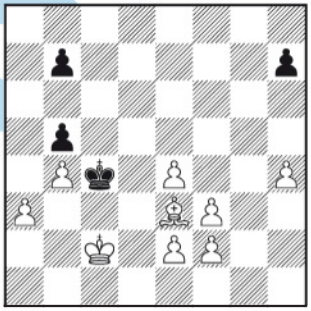
Mate in 3

ORIGINAL

3

Mate in 2

ORIGINAL

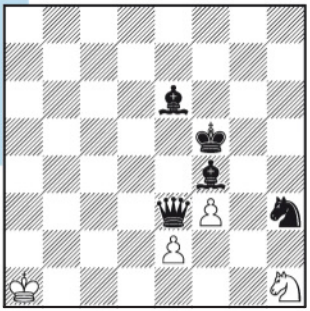


Paul Michelet (London)

Mate in 6

ORIGINAL

4



Geoff Foster (Australia)

Helpmate in 4 - 2 solutions

ORIGINAL

Openings for Amateurs By Pete Tamburro; ptamburro@aol.com

POSITIONAL PLANNING OUT OF THE OPENING

By Pete Tamburro; ptamburro@aol.com

Andy Ansel, chess book collector extraordinaire and superb chess researcher, also collects notebooks left by masters. His column in American Chess Magazine is called Unknown American Chess Games. He writes an appreciation and history of a noted American master, and I annotate most of the games he finds. This game by IM Bill Martz was a brilliant selection. I was in awe of Martz's plan as I played it through, again and again.

You see, positional chess requires you to have a somewhat long-term plan that involves understanding what pawn structure you want, figuring out what potential weaknesses are in your opponent's position and where the right destination squares for your pieces are. Then, you have to come up with a concrete implementation of the plan with a sequence of moves that helps you achieve your goals. It's all in this game!

William E **Martz** - Michael **Chess [A42]**

Stillwater (OK) North American op (4), 08.1974

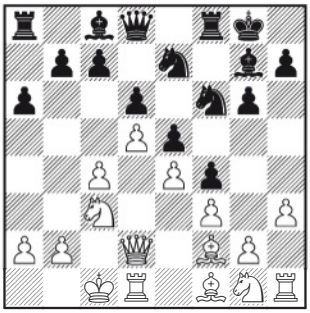
1.c4 g6 2.e4 ♗g7 In the June 1972 British Chess Magazine, William Hartston wrote an article, "The Anti-anti-Gruenfeld." He spent 3+ pages on it, but apparently, Mr. Chess didn't read the literature or perhaps was suspicious of it: 2...e5

3.d4 d6 4.♘c3 ♘d7 Does anyone still play this junk? Oh, yeah! Over 4,000 games with this for Black and some famous GMs to boot. It creates complications and often puts opponents on their own without their precious little book lines. However, Martz has a system against this sort of thing.

5.♗e3 e5 There is 5...♘gf6, but that isn't why Black started out the way he did.

6.d5 ♘e7 Considering the King's Indian similarity, one would think Black, especially with the ♗e3, would want to discourage b4. However, ♘e7 shows that his idea in not playing ♘f6 was to play ♘e7 and f5 without having to retreat the ♘f6 to play the pawn push 6...f5

7.♕d2 0-0 8.0-0-0 f5 9.f3 ♘f6 10.h3 f4 11.♗f2 a6



Black obviously has the position he wants out of the opening. The series of

moves certainly constitutes a unified approach. The question is: does anyone else want this? Black had a set series of moves in mind, no doubt aiming at a kingside attack, but his opponent didn't cooperate. If you were White here, what would your plan be? Martz played a series of opening moves that had an overall strategic plan. All your openings should have that. Thinking of the "ten-move rule" I constantly harp about, if you are here at move 11 and have no idea what to do, then you need to re-evaluate how you study your chess openings. Watch the master!

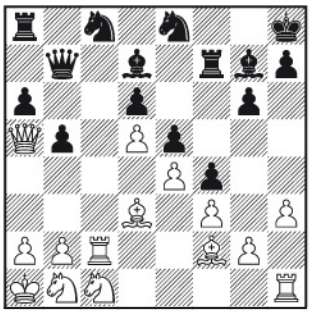
12.♔b1! ♗d7 13.♖c1! While Black may have forestalled a white kingside attack, Martz plays two fine positional moves to lift the curtain on his plan: he's coming down the c-file! With respect to the prior question, did you pick this as your plan?

13...♕b8 14.c5 ♔h8 15.♗d3 Time to get the rest of the team on the field. Black has no counterplay.

15...b6 16.cxd6 cxd6 17.♘ge2 b5

Second plan question: What next? Hint - -there are two weak Black squares of special interest: c6 and a5. What relationship do they have with each other?

18.♔a1 ♘c8 19.♘b1 ♖f7 20.♕a5 ♘e8 21.♖c2 ♕b7 22.♘c1



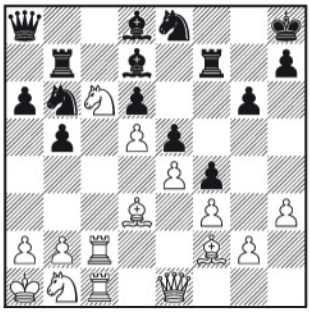
White has a stranglehold on the dark squares as the Indian bishop is useless, but what were those two Nimzowitschian knight retreats about?

22...♖b8 23.♘b3 ♗f6 After all that time to save a tempo for the N move and f5, Black has to give it back with interest just to get the bishop back in the game.

24.♖hc1 Yes, the rooks dominate the c-file, but they have no entry square on c7 or c8, so, other than looking powerful, what is their purpose? Stay tuned.

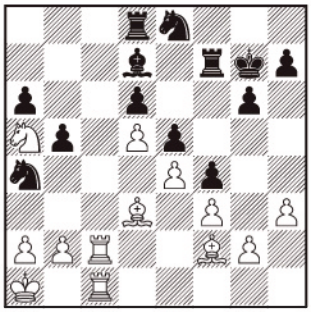
24...♘b6 25.♕e1 ♗d8 26.♘a5 Ah! Now it is all revealed: a5 is a knight move from c6 and a ♘c6 move is now supported by two rooks and a pawn. This is very impressive planning on Martz's part.

26...♕a8 27.♘c6 ♖b7



The knight looks like it's a sheepdog holding a small group of 6 or 7 sheep at bay, but he exchanges it off!

28.♘xd8 ♕xd8 29.♕a5 ♖b8 30.♘d2 ♔g7 31.♘b3 ♘a4 32.♕xd8 ♖xd8 33.♘a5



Absolutely brilliant positional chess! He does the same manoeuvre again: queen to a5, ♘b3, queen moves, ♘a5 and ♘c6 to come. Is that cool or what!? Go back and look at the position after the knights went back to c1 and b1. Did you see that plan?

33...♖b8 34.♘c6 An encore bow at c6. Bravo!! Black in good conscience could have resigned here.

34...♖c8 35.♘b4 ♖xc2 36.♖xc2 a5 37.♘c6 ♗xc6 38.♖xc6 ♖c7 39.♗xb5 ♘c5 40.♗xc5 dxc5 41.♖e6 ♘f6 42.d6

1-0

Source: Unpublished Martz notebook.

There you have it! It's a textbook lesson on exploiting square weaknesses. Go back and play over the game several times. Go to the first diagrammed position where you are asked what your plan out of the opening would be. Now, having played over the game, you should know the plan; however, I'm asking you to play it out in your head, just as you would if you were over the board. Then, you're on your way to becoming a positional player!

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SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS (See page 122)

This month's problems

Very little preamble is needed this month, except perhaps to say that the three-mover by our two distinguished regular Israeli contributors and a distinguished collaborator new to this column (welcome, Fedir!) will be tough to solve. You may prefer quickly to skip to reading (and hopefully enjoying) its solution. Our other new contributor, Geoff Foster, a former editor of the magazine of the British Chess Problem Society, *The Problemist* (see www.theproblemist.org), specializes in helpmates such as our fourth problem. If you are already a helpmate aficionado you will enjoy finding his two solutions - if you're not, it may be a tough solve. Again you may prefer to skip to the solution (remembering that in the collaborative sequences of moves comprising helpmate solutions Black plays first, and so you see Black's moves first, in the position where normally you'd see White's).

A rich two-mover

In David's problem, there is no way that a waiting move would work, and probably the first move to come to our attention is 1.cxd7, threatening 2.dxe8♘#. If 1…♗xd7 then 2.♘xf7 is mate. But 1…c6! (preparing 2…♔d7) refutes. Another pawn promotion is the try 1.g8=♘, which by guarding e7 allows White to threaten 2.♘de4 (which on move 1 would be met by 1…♔e7). After 1.g8=♘, 1…f5 fails against 2.♖e6, but 1…♖e7! refutes. You may have wondered whether I was wrong to say that 1.♘de4+ ♔e7 fails because is not 2.♗f6 (which nicely exploits the guard of f8 by g7 pawn) mate? The answer is 'no': the bishop at d4 has become pinned! However, this points in the direction of the correct key move. Play the bishop move straight away - 1.♗f6!. As White now has a secure guard on e7 he threatens 2.♘de4#, and we have the variations 1…♔c5 (taking the flight granted by the key move) 2.♘ge4# (as 2.♘de4 would be illegal) and 1…♖e7 2.♗xe7#. David was very happy with this construction (save for the black pawn at g2, needed to prevent 1.♖e5 from being a cook), and, I think, with good reason.

A rich three-mover

I said in my intro that this would be tough to solve, and in longer problems, this tends always to be the case when the key move doesn't threaten an aggressive follow-up, but instead envisages a quiet one. So kudos if you found the key move 1.♕c5, appreciating that it doesn't threaten a destructive further move of the queen from c5 or a destructive check by moving the bishop from d5 but seeing that White now threatens 2.Re8!, after which Black will be defenceless (2…♖a8 3.♗d8#; 2…♗g8 3.♘g6#).

There are numerous defences, after which we do indeed see the destructive capacity of the fifth rank battery and of the marauding white queen. If 1…♖a8 (or 1…♖a6) then 2.♗xe4+ ♔xe4 3.♘xc3# (or 2…d5 3.♕xd5#). If 1…♕c4 then 2.♗xc4+ ♔e4 3.♗d3#. If 1…♕xf4 then 2.♗b3+ and now either 2…♔e4 3.♗c2# or 2…d5 3.♕xd5#. If 1…♕d4 then 2.♕xc7+ d6 3.♕xd6#. If 1…cxb6 then 2.♗d6+ (the fourth different square to which the bishop has moved to discover check!) ♔f6 3.♖f8#. Finally, if 1…d6 then 2.♘b4! (another quiet move! - and good to find a second use for this heretofore rather peripheral knight) and Black has no adequate way to stave off the threat of 3.♘c6# - 2…♕xd5 3.♕xd5# and 2…♕xb4 3.♘d3# (an enhanced role for the other white knight too!).

Cornering the black king

Saving keystrokes I'm using the same header as for the third problem (also by Paul Michelet) last time. We'd like to be able in

due course to lure the black king to d4 and then to be able to initiate a mating sequence with a check on the long diagonal. Inspection reveals that 1.♗b6 isn't the way to go. After 1…h5 2.♗d8 ♔d4? 3.♗f6+ would be fine, but in this sequence what about instead 2…b6? And what about on the first move 1…h6? So the key is 1.♗h6!, whereupon we have two nice lines of play - 1…♔d4 2.♗g7+ ♔c4 3.h5! when both 3…b6 and 3…h6 allow 4.Ba1! and mate in two by 5.♔b2 and 6.♔b3; or 1…b6 2.h5! ♔d4 3.♗g7+, similarly.

Precision with nine men

Our helpmate showcases Geoff's composing style. All the units on the board are relevant in both solutions. Although the white king does not contribute to the mating pictures, Black's first moves both (rather surprisingly perhaps) give check and the king must therefore move (to two different squares). It is very pleasant to work out why the various pieces have to take the precise routes they do take, and how the exact order of the moves is determined in both solutions. Helpmate aficionados prefer examples like this, where White and Black engage at close quarters, giving rise to interplay, to ones where White, in one part of the board, 'does his thing' and Black, in another, 'does his': 1.♗e5+ ♔b1 2.♔f4 ♘g3 3.♗f5+ ♔a2 4.♘g5 ♘h5#; and 1.♕g1+ ♔b2 2.♕g6 ♘f2 3.♗g5 ♘g4 4.♘f4 e4#. Note that both mates are *model mates* (every square around the black king inaccessible to him in only one way), and note not only that there are no moves that occur in both solutions but that in each solution every unit on the board finishes up on a different square from in the other solution.

SOLUTIONS TO ENDGAMES (See page 120)

Zinar

1.a3 ♔b2 2.a4 bxa4 3.b5 a3 4.b6 a2 5.b7 a1♕ 6.b8♕+ ♔a3 7.♕a7+ ♔b2 8.♕b6+ ♔a3 9.♕a5+ ♔b2 10.♕b4+ ♔a2 11.♔c2 wins. 'Hurry slowly' because if you play 1.a4 then the Black king is still on b1 and Black can meet b8♕+ by interposing his queen. Zinar called 1.a3 the 'tortoise move'.

Gorgiev

1.g4+ and either **1...♔xg4 2.♔g6 c5 3.h4 ♔xh4 4.♔f5** and catches the pawn, or **1...♔g5 2.♔g7 c5 3.h4+ ♔xg4 4.♔g6 ♔xh4 5.♔f5** (or in this line 3...♔xh4 4.♔f6).

John names the king-deflecting manoeuvre 'the Schlechter feint', after an 1893 game in which Carl Schlechter employed it.

Kovalenko

1.c7 g6 2.c6 h6 3.c5 g5 4.hxg5 hxg5 5.c4 ♔xc7 6.c3 ♔c8 7.c7 g4 8.c6 g3 9.c5 ♔xc7 10.c4 ♔c8 11.c7 g2 12.c6 ♔xc7 13.c5 ♔c8 14.c7 ♔xc7 15.c6 ♔b6 16.c7 g1♕ 17.c8♕ ♕g2+ 18.♔b8 ♕g3+ 19.♔a8 ♕f3+ 20.♔b8 ♕f4+ 21.♔a8 ♕e4+ 22.♔b8 ♕e7 23.a8♘+ draws.

Cathignol

"White wants to break through as far to the left as possible" to drag the Black king across so White's pawns can then break through on the right. He needs, however, to start with 1.d5 to prepare for the usual three pawns against three pawns breakthrough. There are various possible Black defences, but the core line goes:

1.d5 exd5 2.exd5 cxd5 3.a5 bax5 4.b5 axb5 5.cxb5 ♔e7 6.b6 ♔d7 7.b7 ♔c7 8.g5 fxg5 9.h5 gxh5 10.f5 a4 11.f6 a3 12.f7 a2 13.b8♕+ ♔xb8 14.f8♕+. "White's sole surviving pawn wins the day."

On the puzzle he posed about the diagram position, John tells us that a nineteen-move game was found by Jonathan Mestel, but he also noted that "This is not a proven minimum, and if you can find something shorter you may publish it with our good will."

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